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THE OFFICIAL LIFE
OF BENITO MUSSOLINI



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AT A NAVAL REVIEW

THE OFFICIAL LIFE OF BENITO MUSSOLINI

G I O R G I O P I N I

Translated by
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I

IN THE SIGN OF LEO

BENITO MUSSOLINI has called the people who work 'the salt of the Fatherland,' the strength and substance of the nation. He was born in one of the most proletarian provinces of Italy, where the whole life of the people is made up of hard, tenacious, and productive work. In Romagna all wealth comes from the land and from the sea.

'My forebears,' writes Mussolini, 'were peasants who worked the land, and my father was a blacksmith who beat the red-hot iron on the anvil. Sometimes as a youngster I helped my father in his humble labour: I have now the far more arduous task of moulding souls.'

In the broad plain of the Po valley between the Alps, the Apennines, and the Adriatic, the very fertile southern area is characterized by the frank nature of the inhabitants and their dialect: the Romagna is a country where the people live in harmony with the seasons, amid sowing and reaping, faithful to the land which they seldom leave to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The centuries pass without changing the rural character of the Romagnoli, nor the rustic aspect of a country which is both rough and gentle.

A Roman Consul built the road which comes from the Po and touches Rimini. Under the bridges of the Æmilian Way flow the torrents of the Apennines

and the little Rubicon which Cæsar crossed when he cast the die for the first march on Rome. Much of the history of the Empire, of the Medieval and Renaissance lordships and of the Italian Risorgimento developed along this main highway which stretches straight and brown-hued through ancient cities amid the green country-side. Here were born vigorous *condottieri*. Near the sea lies Ravenna with the tomb of Dante and the lonely pine-forest.

In the centre rises Forlì, city of ardent political passions. The road connecting it with the Apennines follows the valley of the Rabbi through 'a sulphur land whose vines produce a heady wine of great fragrance. There are many springs of iodine waters. On this plain, on these waving hills, on these mountain buttresses the ruins of Medieval towers and castles raise their grey and green walls towards the pale sky, bearing witness to the strength of past ages. . . . Such is the land which is dear to me,' writes Mussolini, 'because I was born there.'

To-day the fishermen who sail along the Adriatic coast, the peasants who plough the fields before dawn, and the travellers who follow the Æmilian Way along the plain stretching between the mountains and the sea, perceive in the silent night a luminous beam on the horizon between stars and mist. It is the tricolour lighthouse raised on the high tower of the Rocca delle Caminate which from a hill-top dominates Predappio, the Duce's birth-place, and all Romagna. Up there Mussolini occasionally goes into retreat to work, for the people of Forlì restored that castle and presented it to him. It is a thousand-year-old stronghold which witnessed the alternating feuds of the Middle Ages; it was many times destroyed and rebuilt, it has belonged successively to various feudal families, the Belmonte,

the Ordelaffi, the Malatesta, the Aldobrandini, the D'oria Pamphili, the Baccarini. But at the end of the last century, when the Duce was born at Dovia, a hamlet in the commune of Predappio some fifteen kilometres from Forlì, but few ruins of it remained standing.

July 29, 1883. On that midsummer day the yellow stubble of the wheat already gathered was drying on the hill-sides ; the blazing summer heat poured down on the dusty deserted roads amid the arid clay cliffs and landslides ; the dry torrent beds were all white stones. Mussolini writes : ' I was born on a Sunday, at two in the afternoon, on the feast-day of the patron saint of the parish of Le Caminate. The last of the buttresses of the Apennines descends down to the waving land of Rivaldino and the ancient tower, tall and stately, dominates the whole plain of Forlì. The sun had been in the constellation of Leo for eight days.'

Eleven months from that day little Benito's family removed to the house at Varano which is now the town hall of the new municipality created by the Duce.

The year of Mussolini's birth fell within a grey and gloomy period of Italian history. The struggles of the Risorgimento were ended, the heroes of the political and military battles had passed away, and so had the men who had led them : Cavour, Mazzini, Victor Emmanuel II, and Garibaldi. Among the aged and declining survivors, the Prime Minister Agostino Depretis was the dominant figure. Italian life was wholly monopolized by the endless necessities of internal and international organization ; the most urgent need was to unify the country in its laws, its finances, and above all in its morals ; public works had to be carried out,

agriculture helped, the newborn industries encouraged. The poverty and ignorance of the workers were very serious ; the means and the will with which to remedy them were limited. Italy had no colonies of her own at the very time when all the European Powers were laying hands on the resources of Asia and Africa. Parliamentary government had fallen into the hands of a narrow clique of politicians of the Left, who were mere opportunists, incapable of developing any sort of organic plan. Class interests, the demands of small groups and personal ambitions predominated over the interests of the nation. No one faced the social problems, and the workers, where they were not degraded by extreme poverty and servile habits, began to agitate against the Government, entering the ranks of the first seditious and revolutionary groups organized as a result of the propaganda of the Russian agitator Bakunin. In Romagna, side by side with the Republicans, the pioneers of Socialism gathered round Andrea Costa were agitating. But these men, unlike their later successors, were stout, warm-hearted fighters who did not repudiate their fatherland.

In the international field, after the execution of Guglielmo Oberdan (the Italian patriot from Trieste accused of plotting against the life of the Emperor Francis Joseph), the Irredentist tendency in spite of the Triple Alliance was strong among the Italians who yearned to see Trento and Trieste annexed to Italy. But relations with France were even worse, since, in spite of repeated promises to the contrary, she had seized Tunisia by surprise. For lack of internal resources hundreds of thousands of workers were forced to emigrate abroad and fall under the yoke of foreign capitalism. The conflict

between Church and State still remained acute, owing to the Italian occupation of Rome in 1870, aggravated by the excesses of the anti-Clericals and the intrigues of the Freemasons who had penetrated into every branch of the public service for their own sinister ends.

But talent and productive capacity were not lacking. The people, ever prolific, did not abandon the land, while the best of the survivors of the Risorgimento epic kept alive the national ideals, together with a few writers such as Alfredo Oriani and the greatest poets of the age, Carducci, Pascoli, and D'Annunzio. Many gallant pioneers, spiritual successors of the great Italian navigators of the past, lost their lives in African exploration. The new generations grew up under the stimulus of a necessary revival and amid the many individual and collective sufferings the youth of Italy showed an unconscious but irresistible impulse towards a new life.

But with the exception of Francesco Crispi, who saw his colonial enterprise shattered at Adowa, there seemed, for many decades, to be no man capable of gathering together the forces of the nation to restore to Italy her historic function as the successor of ancient Rome, a leader such as was conceived by Proudhon, who as early as 1863 had written : ' Let but a man arise from his own land, a Richelieu, a Colbert, a Condé, and in less than a generation Italy will take her place among the great Empires and her influence will be mighty throughout Europe.' At the end of the last century Crispi, then on his death-bed, declared : " Italy has been constituted, but her soul is drowsy, her vigour extinguished ; the man is lacking who shall reveal her and lead her along the path of those audacious

virtues which bring out the greatness of nations. Shall we see such a man arise? I hope so." Finally, Gabriele d'Annunzio in his 'Città del silenzio,' sang :

' Sono le glebe tue fatte sì povere,
O Italia, che non sorgavi un novello
Eroe da l'aspro sangue contadino ? '

(Have thy sods grown so poor,
Oh Italy, that a new hero of rough
Peasant blood may not arise from them ?)

Fifty-two years after his birth, while he was preparing that African enterprise which was to lead to the foundation of the Empire, Mussolini unveiled the following inscription on an old farm-house at Montemaggiore : ' From 1600 to 1900 the peasant generations of the Mussolinis worked on this farm, and here my father was born, November 11, 1854.'

The Duce seldom speaks of himself. Rather than of the past he thinks of the future. He has, however, a special memory for his childhood as a son of workers, a childhood poor in affection, formed in the hard school of poverty. ' The records of my parish are there to bear witness that I am descended from honest folk who worked the land. . . . If we go back a little further we find that the Mussolini family acquired some notoriety in the city of Bologna in the twelfth century. In 1270 one, Giovanni Mussolini, was the leader of that aggressive and war-like city ; his colleague in the Government of Bologna, in those days of knights in armour, was Fulcieri Paulucci de Calboli,¹ he, too, a member of a Predappio family, to this day one of the most

¹ A descendant of this man, bearing the same name and surname, was one of the heroes of the World War. After having been desperately wounded and crippled he conducted a vigorous propaganda campaign throughout the country in the last year of the War. He died of his wounds in 1919.

distinguished. The vicissitudes of Bologna and the internecine divisions of its parties and factions—following the usual progress of the conflicts and upheavals characteristic of all struggles for power—obliged the Mussolinis, some time after, to go into exile at Argelato. Thence they spread out into the neighbouring districts. There is no doubt that at that period their varied adventures in the course of the ups and downs of fortune made them fall into reduced circumstances.’ In the eighteenth century we find a Mussolini in London, a good musician. But the principal nucleus of the family had previously split up into several branches, one of which was in Venice. Later the Mussolinis reappear in the Romagna, the land of their origins, as farm labourers.

The Duce’s father, Alessandro, was the son of Luigi and of Caterina Vasumi, and was born at Montemaggiore. His son thus describes him : ‘ He never went to school. As soon as he reached the age of ten he was sent to the neighbouring village of Dovadola to be apprenticed to a blacksmith. From Dovadola he removed to Meldola, where between 1875 and 1880 he first came into contact with the ideas of the internationalists. Then, having become a master craftsmen in his trade, he opened up a smithy at Dovia. This village, then called “Piscaza”—that is still its nickname—did not enjoy a good reputation. My father found work and began to disseminate the ideas of the International. He founded a numerous group which was afterwards dissolved and dispersed in consequence of a police raid.’

Alessandro, a dark-haired youth of medium height, then became ‘ a heavy man, with powerful fleshy hands. . . . His heart and his spirit were

brimming over with Socialist theories. Deep were his sympathies for doctrines and causes. He discussed them in the evening, in the company of friends, and then his eyes glittered as with fire. The Internationalist movement attracted him and he was familiar with the names famous among the partisans in Italy of the social cause, such as Andrea Costa, Balducci, Amilcare Cipriani,¹ and even that most tender and pastoral spirit of them all, Giovanni Pascoli.² He was an intelligent, self-educated man, and he published occasional articles in some of the bellicose news-sheets. Honest, generous-hearted, and straightforward, he chose as his motto : ' To live in liberty and working, or to die fighting.'

For the sake of his principles he underwent sundry trials and was even imprisoned in the castle of Forlì. Later he became a municipal counsellor, assessor, and even mayor of Predappio. He founded one of the very earliest co-operatives, introduced the use of machinery for agriculture, promoted local public works. Although ever a poor man, he always helped his needy comrades with a truly Romagnol generosity.

When in 1877 the first school was opened at Dovia the lusty blacksmith fell in love with the youthful schoolmistress, Rosa Maltoni, she, too, a Romagnol, having been born at Villafranca di Forlì on April 22, 1858. Her father delayed giving his consent to the marriage because the would-be bridegroom was known as a seditious agitator under police supervision. But love won through, and after four years of patient waiting the wedding was celebrated at the end of October 1882. A year later

¹ Agitator and revolutionist, born in 1844, he had taken part in many wars and risings in Italy and France and had been in prison several times. He died in Paris in 1918.

² One of Italy's most distinguished lyric poets and man of letters. Born 1855, he died in 1912.

their eldest son was born. Alessandro conferred on him the three names of Benito Amilcare Andrea, in honour of three great revolutionaries, Benito Juarez the Mexican, Amilcare Cipriani and Andrea Costa, Italians. Similarly he named his second son Arnaldo, after Arnaldo da Brescia, the rebel against the Church.

Nursed by his mother, Benito grew up a lively and robust child, but from his earliest age he was attentive and serious. It was never possible to get him to play games, to consort with other children. He himself remembers this fact when he calls up the vision of those distant years and the patient suffering of his mother the school-teacher. Rosa Maltoni was tall and of proud bearing, virtuous, and steady in spirit. She led a model life, wholly dedicated to her dear ones and to the school where she taught. She was a woman of old-fashioned type, religious, and devoted to her husband ; but she restrained with vigilant effort his ardent political impulses and suffered on account of the inadequacy of their joint earnings. Her whole life was one of perpetual privation, and she died prematurely.

II

YOUTH

‘WHEN about four or five years old I began to learn the A B C and I was soon able to read correctly. The image of my grandfather vanishes into the distance. Instead I loved my grandmother. My life as far as concerns my relations with others began at six years. From six to nine I went to school, first at my mother’s, then under Silvio Marani, who at that time was a teacher at Predappio. I was a restless little scamp, ready with my fists. Often I came home with my head broken as a result of a stone-throwing match. But I knew how to revenge myself.

‘On holidays, armed with a small shovel, and in the company of my brother Arnaldo, I spent my time working in the bed of the river. Once I stole some decoy birds from a *paretaio* (a trap consisting of a net spread over hazel boughs). Pursued by the owner, I ran for my life over a hill, waded across a river, but never let go of my prize. I also attended my father’s smithy and was allowed to pull the bellows. I was devoted to birds, particularly to owls. I attended religious services with my mother, who was a devout believer, and with my grandmother, but I could not bear remaining long in church, especially during the great ceremonies. The rosy light of the burning candles, the penetrating odour of incense, the colours of the sacred vestments, the

drawling sing-song of the faithful and the sound of the organ disturbed me deeply.'

He was the friend of cats, and he loved a nice little white horse, which he often rode, leading him to water in the stream. The marvels of nature, the mysterious psychology of animals, the atmosphere, and the things by which he was surrounded interested him more than human beings. The years of his wild childhood have remained impressed in his memory as those of a fundamental period of his life, and he often states that he considers that he had moulded his character within his first fifteen years.

In his war diary, dated Christmas, 1916, he wrote : ' Twenty-five years ago I was a punctilious and violent child. A nomad by instinct, I wandered about from morning to evening along the river, and stole fruit and birds' nests. I used to go to Mass. Christmas of those days is still vivid in my memory. Few indeed were those who did not attend the Christmas Mass—my father and some others. The trees and the hawthorn hedges along the road leading to San Cassiano were rigid and silvery with hoar-frost. It was cold. The first Masses were for the old women who rose early. When I saw them appearing beyond the Piana I knew it was our turn. I remember that I followed my mother. In the church there were so many lights, and on the altar in a little flowery cradle was the Christ Child born during the night. All this was picturesque and appeased my fantasy. Only the odour of incense disturbed me and sometimes gave me moments of insupportable nausea. Finally the voluntary played on the organ closed the ceremony. The crowd streamed out. Along the road there was much satisfied chattering. At midday

the traditional and tasty Romagnol *cappelletti* (a form of macaroni) smoked on the table. How many years, indeed how many centuries, have passed since those days ? ’

An incident which occurred to him at that time reveals the temper of the boy. He had climbed up a quince apple-tree with some companions, when the furtive band was put to flight by the menaces of the owner, who arrived unexpectedly on the scene. One of the boys jumped down from the tree, but fell badly and broke his leg. Benito alone refused to leave him to his fate, and indeed, regardless of the fury of the owner, hoisted the injured boy on to his shoulders and went slowly away bearing his suffering burden. The man was astonished at such a generous action.

Alessandro Mussolini, filled with his political passion, brought up his son in the free and easy Romagnol manner ; he realized that the boy would follow him, and stimulated him with rough and ready expressions and the example of his own daily activities, which were divided between his work at the smithy and the impassioned discussions with his party comrades. His contemporaries were afraid of Benito, who exercised an irresistible authority over them, and even to-day they recall that ‘ it was impossible to say no to that blessed boy.’ He was always the first in the most dangerous raids in the stony torrent bed of the Rabbi and on the summits of the surrounding hills. He did not feel that irresistible urge for companionship which is common to most children ; indeed, he often drew apart from the other boys, as though peeved with their company, to be alone and read Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, shut up in the house or the stable in winter, or in the warm season sitting at the foot

of a great tree which still spreads its shade over the steps of the very ancient parish church of San Cassiano ; it is still called the Duce's oak. In the silence of the clear nights the stars filled him with enchantment, just as in later years when he was a *bersagliere* in the trenches his vivid eyes followed the glittering arc of the Milky Way which in Romagna is called ' the Road to Rome.'

An old woman living in the Mussolini house used to say : " It seemed as though Benito had an idea of his own in his head ! "

Rosa Maltoni soon felt the necessity of sending this rugged and intelligent son of hers to follow a more regular course of studies at the Salesian college at Faenza. ' My father was at first strongly opposed to this plan, but he ended by giving way. During the weeks which preceded my departure I was more of a scamp than ever. I felt a vague unrest within me, I had a confused feeling that a college and a prison were the same thing ; I wanted to have a thoroughly good time of it, to enjoy on the roads, in the fields, by the ditches, through the vineyards with their bunches of ripe grapes, my last days of freedom. About the middle of that October everything was ready : clothes, linen, money. I do not remember that I felt very sorry at leaving my brothers ; Edvige was then three years old, Arnaldo seven : I was instead very sorry to have to leave a siskin which I kept in a cage under my window.

' On the eve of my departure I squabbled with one of my companions and aimed a blow at him, but instead of striking him I hit the wall and hurt my knuckles. I had to leave with a bandaged hand. At the moment of saying good-bye I cried. In the trap, drawn by a donkey, my father and I took our seats. We placed the bags under the seat and started

off, but we had not covered two hundred metres when the donkey stumbled and fell. "A bad omen," said my father. But he pulled the donkey up and we set off once more. During the trip I did not say a word. I gazed at the country-side, which was beginning to lose its greenness, and I followed the flight of the swallows, the course of the river. We passed through Forlì. The town made a great impression on me ; I had been there before but did not remember it. I only knew that once I had lost my way in it and that after some hours of anxious search I had been found calmly seated at the table of a shoemaker who had generously given me, then a child barely four years old, half a Toscano cigar to smoke.

The most vivid impression which I felt on entering Faenza was aroused by the sight of the iron bridge over the Lamone which connects the town with its suburb. It might have been two in the afternoon when we knocked at the door of the Salesian convent. I was presented to the censor, who looked at me and said : " He must be a lively boy." My father then embraced and kissed me. He, too, was very much moved. When I heard the great doorway closed behind my back I burst into tears.'

Thus we have Benito, nine years of age, a prisoner behind the walls of a grey and gloomy college, forced to follow a methodical, monotonous existence, almost always detached from his school-fellows, who were more sociable and meek in character. He had frequent outbursts of rebellion from the earliest days, especially when he noticed that in the refectory the college boarders ate at three separate tables : the poor ones, like himself, separated from the well-born and the rich. He

was warm-hearted with the weak, but his every action spelt intolerance. He gave vent to it by doggedly reading everything which came his way, while anxiously awaiting the summer holidays which would give him a few months' freedom again. He learned his lessons for the day at the first reading. He oscillated between the Bible and the catechism and the novels of Jules Verne. In the meanwhile he developed physically; he grew broad-shouldered and broad-chested; his face became square.

In the summer he saw his brothers at Dovia once more, he again helped his old friend the *contadino* Filippone in his spade-work and listened to the mysterious tales of witchcraft told to him by the village sorceress, one Giovanna.

But in the autumn he had to return to the hateful college, to his strict teachers, the chilly dormitories, the daily religious services, the wretched life varied by daily fights with his school-mates. One day, offended by an older boy, he reacted with such violence that he was threatened with expulsion. He was allowed to remain until the end of the term only through the benevolent intervention of the Bishop of Forlì, but was not to return the following year, during which he had to study at home, assisted by his mother. He covered the subjects of the fifth form of the elementary school and at the same time listened to the political preachings of his father, who exercised a profound influence over him.

About the end of 1895 the question arose as to how he could continue his studies in view of the extreme poverty of his family. Out of love for her son, his mother did not hesitate to apply for a subsidy, and wrote a letter to the Prefect of the province to that effect. Her request was not

granted but the letter bears witness to her instinctive realization of Benito's abilities, a realization barely veiled by the modesty of her motherly timidity: 'Remember, Excellency, that this year the economic difficulties in this little town are at their height on account of the poor harvests and the total failure of the grape crop, the only product of this district. It is for these reasons that our family finds itself in such reduced circumstances that we shall be forced to interrupt the studies of this poor twelve-year-old child of ours, who is in the Royal Normal School of Forlimpopoli and who, according to his own teachers, shows some promise.'

Nevertheless the boy managed to attend the technical school, then the teachers' training college, and eventually secured a teacher's certificate. Every summer he reappeared among his own people in the Varano house, growing in height and in vigour. His great, gleaming eyes bewitched his young friends. He laughed but little, was ever reading, and ever more influenced by his father's revolutionary passion. He spoke but rarely, and when he did he spoke excitedly.

Other reminiscences throw light on the years of his adolescence. In September 1896 he suffered a first sorrow at the death of his grandmother, Marianna Ghetti, who was 'a tall, dour woman, ever in movement. Her passion was to walk along the river and collect all the fragments of timber left in its bed after the floods, which, with the summer thunderstorms, constituted the events of our days. Another habit was that of never wanting to sit at table with us; she would consume her very frugal meals, consisting throughout the week of a vegetable soup at noon and a dish of wild chicory, eaten off the same common platter.

‘ Arnaldo and I slept at that time in the same room, in the same great iron bed, made by my father, without a mattress and only a palliasse of Indian corn sheaves. Our apartment consisted of two rooms on the second floor of the Varano house and to reach it we had to pass through the third room, which was the school. Our own room was also the kitchen. By the side of our bed was a wardrobe of reddish wood containing our clothes ; opposite was a curved book-case full of old books and newspapers. Arnaldo and I used to glance through them ; there it was that we read our first poems and saw the first illustrated papers, such as *L'Epoca*, which was then published at Genoa. It was among these papers one day that I made a discovery which filled me with curiosity, astonishment and emotion : I found the love letters which my father had written to my mother. I read a few of them.

‘ The window was opposite the bed. Thence we saw the Rabbi stream, the hills, the moon rising behind Fiordinano. On the other side of the bed was the bin where the bread was kept ; close by was the fire-place, nearly always empty. In the other room my father and mother and Edvige slept. The furniture consisted of a chest of drawers and a large wardrobe of white wood, on the top of which were nine rolls of linen for the household of which my mother was inordinately proud and jealous. In the middle was a table on which I worked at my lessons. It was at this table that a little later I first began my general reading, which extended from Roberto Ardigo's *Morals of the Positivists*, then a very popular work, to Fiorentino's *History of Philosophy* ; from *Les Misérables* of Victor Hugo to Alessandro Manzoni's poems. My brother

Arnaldo was my comrade in games and adventures, especially in the summer. In the winter it was cold in our smoke-ridden house and only the snow gave us enjoyment. Our poverty was great. Friends lent us bread, oil and salt. When an agricultural labourer was at work he was paid 28 soldi (about 1s. 2d.) for a whole day. An event which remained impressed on our minds, and of which later I often reminded Arnaldo, was the departure of a party of emigrants for Brazil. Mattico Pompignoli from Varano was one of them. There were emotional scenes and tears. I remember seeing one evening, down the stairs, which were ill-lit by petroleum lamps, the departing travellers, bearing great sacks on their shoulders, while their relatives from behind the bannisters continued to call out their farewells. Most of them never returned. Many died on the *fazendas* of Minas Geraes.

'The summer was our season. Once the school term was over my mother's classroom was cleared of its furniture and served to shelter the wheat threshed by the machine first purchased by my father. We then went out in search of fruit and birds' nests. We pecked into the branches of the trees for the first ripe fruits; the river was our favourite goal. Even at that time Arnaldo revealed his own temper. He was infinitely quieter than I was, and milder. Whereas my games with my comrades often ended in furious fights, I never remember his having ever provoked a brawl. He was gentle and reflective. He restrained and advised me, and helped me to tidy up and appear before my father without any fear of being spanked. While I am writing these lines I see the river once more, the stream, the roads, the farm-houses, the

spire of San Cassiano, my contemporaries, the "Callarone" which rose from the provincial road to Varano, the gleaners in the summer and in the winter the endless games of *briscola*¹ in Cireneo's stable, games which were interrupted only when the illustrated papers with pictures of the East African campaign arrived. Among the memories of my childhood are the names of Makallè, Toselli, Taitu, Amba Alaji, Major Toselli.'

Every autumn Mussolini returned to resume his studies in the Forlimpopoli normal school, of which the headmaster was the brother of Giosuè Carducci, the greatest poet of the time. The teachers had to show great patience with a pupil who was held in awe by his school-fellows and who would not stand any nonsense with those who annoyed him. After an incident of a graver nature than usual he realized that he had gone too far, and apologized; he was forgiven because the headmaster realized that that boy would do honour to the school.

Benito loved music and did not even refuse to play the trombone in the college band. One day, when the poet Giosuè Carducci passed through Forlimpopoli and visited the college named after him, his brother the headmaster introduced the son of the Dovia blacksmith to him. On the death of Giuseppe Verdi the same headmaster asked young Mussolini to commemorate the great composer. Thus the future Duce spoke for the first time in public in a theatre, and at seventeen years of age registered his first success as an orator.

His youth was never thoughtless or lacking in seriousness; it was divided up into periods of deep and silent meditation and rarer moments of lively distraction, such as occasional country dances in

¹ A popular Italian card game.

carnival time. He liked best to discuss politics, and nearly every day his school-fellows gathered round him to hear him speak, as though he were their tribune.

He secured his teacher's diploma at eighteen years of age. He spent the following summer with friends by the seaside, and soon became an expert swimmer. He even wrote some poems in the style of Carducci. But when autumn came he was faced with the problem of earning his livelihood, as the family resources were extremely limited. He sent out many applications for jobs as a clerk or a school teacher in different municipalities. While he was at Predappio he was refused an appointment as clerk, and his father, who was proud of him, shrugged his shoulders and in rugged accents pointed out what his path should be : "This is not the place for you ; go out into the world. In any case with Predappio or without Predappio, you will be the Crispi of to-morrow." Crispi is indeed one of the names to conjure with in the Fascist era, during which a tablet was raised in his honour on the stairs of the Palazzo Chigi, now the Italian Foreign Office. The aged Alessandro had no doubts whatsoever ; this boy of his would do honour to the family. He was destined to lead. Twenty years later, while the Duce was attending the Monza motor car race from the grand stand, an old Sicilian gentleman, almost echoing the words of the Dovia blacksmith, cried out to him enthusiastically : "I salute in you the brains of Cavour, the fist of Crispi." And he repeated the salute three times.

After the repression of the Milan rebellion in 1898 and the murder of King Humbert at the very beginning of the new century, the Italian Socialist

Party had become domesticated in Parliament and tended towards reformist ideas to such an extent as to provide a profitable political career for young men. But not for Benito Mussolini. His party comrades, who had supported his candidature for the post of assistant teacher in the elementary school of Gualtieri Emilia, soon realized that, with his extremist views, he was not prepared to accept half-measures.

He arrived at Gualtieri from Romagna on February 13, 1902, wrapped up in a romantic-looking cloak. 'The town,' he wrote, 'is about one kilometre distant from the banks of the Po, from which it is protected by powerful embankments; along the top of these roads run. I arrived there on a misty and gloomy afternoon. Someone was awaiting me at the station. That same day I met the leading citizens of the town, Socialists and members of the municipal administration, and I was able to board for 40 lire a month (about £1 12s.). My salary as a teacher was 56 lire a month (£2 12s.). It was not a very cheerful prospect. My school was about two kilometres from the town, in the hamlet of Pieve Saliceto. I had some forty pupils, very meek little boys, and I grew very fond of them.' The building in which this rural school was housed was only one story high and a very modest structure; behind it was a small orchard with a row of vines and a few scattered trees. An old schoolmistress remembers how Mussolini often made his pupils sing Mameli's hymn, 'Fratelli d'Italia, l'Italia s'è desta,' composed during the early years of the Risorgimento and which was to prove in 1859, during the Libyan war of 1911-2 and during the World War one of 'the airs that led to victory.' To-day it is, with the Royal March, Garibaldi's

hymn, and the Fascist anthem, one of the four official songs of Fascist Italy.

During recreation time Mussolini would withdraw into the orchard to read, as he had done as a boy under the San Cassiano oak. His school duties left him a good deal of leisure, which he employed in learning to play the violin, in hiking with his friends to the neighbouring villages, or in talking politics between card games. Nor did he neglect the village girls.

In the summer season he would often take a swim in the river before having a jumping or boxing match with those few youths who followed his example. He was appointed secretary of the local Socialist club, but refused to accept the Reformist principles then dominating in the neighbouring city of Reggio Emilia ; indeed he sympathized with the audacious syndical movement which was beginning to secure support in the province of Parma. One day the leaders of the Socialist section solemnly cross-examined him on the fundamental canons of the Marxist faith, and realized how deeply he differed from themselves when they heard him state : " Only he who can feel ready to sacrifice himself without regrets for his own ideas, thereby accomplishing deeds outside the common rule, is entitled to call himself a revolutionary. The Reformist movement, which does not admit the armed insurrection of a people enslaved for forty years to its false idols and to falsely democratic institutions, should be flatly rejected. As for religious faith, that is a chord which should not be touched ; even great scientists have found at a certain point of their investigations a blank wall beyond which they could not see anything."

From that moment he was regarded as unortho-

dox, and was condemned even as a school teacher by the municipal administrators. But the people of Gualtieri took a different view, and when on the anniversary of the death of Garibaldi the official orator selected for the commemoration failed to appear, they demanded that Mussolini should speak. Although taken by surprise, he issued from the neighbouring inn, put on his jacket and delivered a long impromptu speech, in which he inveighed against the mean-spirited Italian inertia of the times. He was loudly applauded.

In the final report on the school year the teacher made some remarks on the conditions of the school and on the methods of teaching. 'I have always secured discipline,' he declared, 'with very simple means : by attracting the attention and the interest of the pupils and watching them carefully. That which is secured by coercive measures is no true discipline ; it represses the pupil's individuality and arouses undesirable sentiments. The teacher must forestall and remove the causes of trouble in order to avoid having painfully to repress them.' On the last day he gave his pupils as a subject for composition the theme 'Perseverance brings success.'

III

THE EMIGRANT

BY this time Mussolini had decided to get away from that restricted local atmosphere and try his fortune elsewhere, seeking some goal as yet still indistinct in his mind. He quitted that short phase of his laboured existence without regret. Already, while he was still a student at Forlì, he had said to a friend of his family : " I am studying to become a teacher, but you will surely never believe that I was born to teach children."

His mother, living far away, hoped that her son was settling down, and sent him a postal order for 45 lire, whereupon he set out on his travels on July 9, 1902 with only that small sum in his pocket.

It was not until the following September that a friend received the first news of him, a dramatic story of his hard vicissitudes of poverty and work. ' From Parma to Milan, to Chiasso, the unbearable heat nearly made me die of thirst. Chiasso, the first republican town, gave me hospitality until 10.45 p.m. On reading the *Milan Secolo* I was surprised to learn of the arrest of my father, who had been involved in election disorders. The news disturbed me only because, had I heard it at Gualtieri, I should not have left for Switzerland but for the Romagna instead. Having made friends with a travelling companion, one Tangherone of Pontremoli, I changed some Italian

money and got into a train which was to reach Lucerne the next morning, a twelve-hour journey. The coach was full of Italians. Would you believe it? I spent nearly the whole time standing up by the window. The night was magnificent. The moon rose behind the great high mountains white with snow amid the silvery laughter of the stars. The lake of Lugano showed magic reflections, like a polished metal surface struck by unknown fairy lights. The St. Gothard appeared to my eyes like a giant concentrated on thought while the steel serpent, taking advantage of his slumbers, conveyed me in headlong flight towards new peoples. In the coach everyone was sleeping, I alone was awake with my thoughts. What was I thinking about that night which divided two phases of my life? I do not remember. Only the next morning—and that may have been due to physical exhaustion—when travelling through German Switzerland, a November rain greeted us like the farewell of some unhappy creature, I remembered, with a sense of heart burning, the green lands of Italy kissed by a fiery sun. . . . Was it a first feeling of home-sickness? Perhaps. At Lucerne I changed trains and took a ticket for Yverdon, encouraged by my companion who had promised me a job with a relative of his, a cloth merchant. I reached Yverdon at eleven on Thursday the 10th; thirty-six hours in the train. Dazed and weary, I went to a wretched pot-house where for the first time I had occasion to speak French. I ate. Then we went to that Italian merchant. He filled me with chatter. Nevertheless he asked me to eat with him and I accepted. More inconclusive chatter. Finally he gave me a five-franc piece. In order that he should not think he was making me a present

I left him a very handsome knife in the Arab style, purchased at Parma on the first of April, as a pledge.

' On the Friday I spent an hour before the statue of Pestalozzi who was born at Yverdon, and then stayed in bed for 23 hours. On the Saturday I went to the neighbouring town of Orbe, together with an unemployed house-painter, to work as a stonemason. I found a job and on Monday the 14th I began. Eleven hours' work a day, 32 centimes per hour. I went back and forth 121 times with a handbarrow full of stones to the second floor of a building in course of construction. By evening the muscles of my arms had swollen. I ate some potatoes cooked under the ashes, and fully dressed I threw myself on to the bed, which was a heap of straw. At 5 a.m. I arose and went back to my work. I was trembling with the terrible rage of the powerless. My employer drove me to distraction. The third day he said to me: "You are too well dressed!" That phrase was meant to be significant. I should have liked to retaliate, to smash the head of that ill-mannered boor upstart who accused me of laziness while my bones were cracking under the weight of the stones, to call him a coward.

' And then what? He who pays you is always right. Saturday came. I told my employer that I had decided to quit and therefore asked to be paid off. He went into his office while I remained outside on the landing. Soon afterwards he came out again. With ill-disguised anger he threw me 20 francs and a few centimes, saying: "Here are your wages, and they are stolen." I was thunderstruck. But what could I do to him? Kill him. What did I do to him? Nothing. Why? I was hungry and had no shoes. I had had a pair of shoes, almost

new ; I had left them in strips on the building stones which had torn my hands like the soles of the shoes.

‘ At Lausanne I managed to get along fairly well with the money I had earned at Orbe. Then I was without a bean. One Monday the only metal object I possessed was a nickel medal of Karl Marx. I had eaten a chunk of bread in the morning and I did not know where to sleep that night. In despair I walked about, but the cramps in my stomach prevented me from going far and I sat down on the pedestal of the statue of William Tell which stands in Montbenon Park. My expression must have been terrible because those who came to look at the monument gazed on me with suspicion, almost with fear.

‘ At five I quitted Montbenon and proceeded towards Ouchy. I walked for some time on the quay, a beautiful road by the shore of the lake, and in the meanwhile evening fell. In the twilight I was distracted by the last lights and the last ringing of the old bells. I was overcome by an infinite melancholy and asked myself on the shores of Lake Lemman whether life was worth living for another day. . . . While I was so thinking a harmony as sweet as the lullaby of a mother crooning over the cradle of her child changed the course of my thoughts and I turned round. There was an orchestra of forty performers playing before the sumptuous Hôtel Beau Rivage. I leaned against the railings of the garden, peered into the thick foliage of the trees, and listened. The music satisfied both brain and stomach. But the intervals were terrible. The cramps of hunger tore at my entrails like red-hot needles. In the meanwhile the bands of pleasure-seekers were wandering along the avenues

of the park and I heard the rustle of silk dresses and the murmuring of languages which I did not understand. An elderly couple passed by me. They seemed to be English. I should have liked to ask them for "l'argent pour me coucher ce soir." But the words died on my lips. The woman, stumpy and baldish, was glittering in gold and jewels.

'From ten to eleven I lie under a barge. The air from the Savoy shore is blowing and it is cold. I return to the city and spend the rest of the night under the *grand pont* (the connecting link between two hills). The next morning I look at myself in the windows of a shop out of curiosity. I am unrecognizable. I meet a Romagnolo. I briefly tell him my story. He laughs at me. I curse him. He puts his hand into his pocket and he gives me 10 sous. I thank him. I hasten to a baker's shop and buy a roll. I turn my steps towards the wood. I feel as though I had a treasure. When I am well away from the centre of the city I get my teeth into the roll with the ferocity of a Cerberus. I have eaten nothing for twenty-four hours.'

Another day, again hungry and wandering about the country, he had to make up his mind to ask for some bread of a family which was peacefully gathered for supper round a table covered with a white cloth, under the light of a lamp which had attracted Mussolini's attention from the road. No one answered the odd request of that pale-faced stranger with his hard glittering eyes. "Give me some," he repeated without begging for it. Then in silence a hand stretched out and gave him that bread of which, famished as he was, he again realized the precious value. It was that value which many years later induced the Duce to proclaim the battle of wheat and also inspired him

to write a hymn which to-day children learn at school.

In a speech delivered at Turin while the world economic depression was at its height, Mussolini could in all sincerity say to the people: "It is from the humane point of view that I am anxious, because the mere thought of a family without the wherewithal to live gives me an acute sense of physical suffering. I know from personal experience what an empty house and a bare table mean."

He again became a stone-mason and specialized in the moulding of the jambs and cornices of windows. Even to-day when he visits the public buildings in course of construction ordered by him in the cities and in the areas of reclaimed land, he often handles a trowel and pick with a skill which embarrasses the amateurs present and his criticisms astonish the foremen on account of the practical sense which prompts them.

At Lausanne, while he was editing a Socialist paper, *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, he attended Professor Vilfredo Pareto's lectures at the University and earned his livelihood as shop-boy to a wine-merchant. Ever dissatisfied, he meditated on emigrating to Madagascar. Instead he gave vent to his exasperation by getting into touch with the international extremist groups in Geneva and Berne, especially the Russians and Germans. It is probable that he also met Lenin. Bolder than his companions in misfortune, among whom were the Serrati brothers, he occasionally took upon himself to pawn common property. From Berne he was expelled by the authorities because during a political meeting a police informer who hoped to attend it unobserved was wounded. This had occurred against Mussolini's express wish.

Mussolini returned to Geneva and thence pushed on into Savoy, visiting Annemasse and Chambéry, where he planned to publish a political review. At this time the revolutionary leader Amilcare Cipriani, a friend of the Dovia blacksmith, stated that he wished to meet Mussolini. Cipriani was then in Paris, and Benito set forth on foot in mid-winter for the city of the Commune. During the trip he got into the company of a queer globe-trotter, a young Russian, lanky, long-haired, and a very learned polyglot, who had an alarum clock tied to his wrist as a watch. But lack of money and that odd and somewhat compromising company induced Mussolini to change his itinerary. We next find him in Milan, as a contributor to the *Avanguardia socialista*; then in May 1903 he is again in Berne and in the Ticino, a stone-mason, propagandist, and indefatigable hiker. At Zürich he studied German and read Nietzsche for the first time.

He now heard that his mother was seriously ill, and hastened back to his old home at Dovia, squalid and sad in the chill winter. But soon afterwards he set out for Switzerland once more with his brother Arnaldo. He spent some time between Lugano and Bellinzona working in a distillery and in an agricultural machinery workshop. He continued to write for the *Avvenire del Lavoratore*, the *Avanguardia socialista*, and *Il Proletario* of New York, ever attacking the Reformists who had been domesticated by Parliamentary life. In February he spoke at Zürich during a congress held under the chairmanship of A. O. Olivetti, editor of *Pagine libere*. At that time two new political tendencies appeared on the horizon in Italy, one of the extreme Right and the other of the extreme Left—Nationalism, which

reacted against the inertia of the Liberals and above all against the exotic influences of the 'immortal principles' of the French Revolution and of British Constitutionalism—and Syndicalism, which on the opposite side reacted against the influence of German Socialism, French Freemasonry, Reformist gradualness and materialistic positivism. Mussolini never felt attached to any of these groups. His revolutionary conception, both social and national, was not bound up with doctrinal schemes, but his ideas absorbed the best of the extremist tendencies. This stands out in the words he spoke at the Zürich Congress :

"Through our sensibility as emigrants we are better able to realize the wrongs committed against us by that complex mass of men, ideas, and institutions, which characterize Italian political life of to-day. We are the good seed of sacrifice, and our courageous, disinterested, decisive action, against everyone and everything, will in a distant future bear those fruits which it would be folly to hope for to-day. I should speak to you, my comrades, about the position of the Italian Socialist Party ; but why should we, in this same brilliant day, embitter ourselves by remembering the traditional shame of those who are the head of it ? "

At Lausanne, in a debate, he faced the supreme pontiff of European Reformism, Vandervelde. Soon after he was arrested and locked up in the Lausanne prison. It was Easter eve. 'Suddenly all the bells rang out loud, gay peals announcing the vespers of the Resurrection. The sonorous waves died in my cell, already immersed in darkness, and the metallic symphony aroused memories of my youth spent in freedom under the sun in the broad greenery of mother Romagna.'

While he was detained awaiting an order of expulsion he made acquaintance with his prison comrades, an old tramp who was a cross between Mephistopheles and Charon, a German, and an Italian who had killed a man in a brawl and was now concealing a serious wound he had received. Mussolini attended him and bandaged him with strips of his own shirt while the wounded man, almost bloodless, realizing that he had not long to live, told him the story of his adventures.

Mussolini was set free, but expelled from the Canton of Vaud. He escorted the wounded man as far as Bellinzona and there remained as the guest of Professor Rensi before returning to Lausanne, where he earned his livelihood by giving lessons and organizing strikes, ever under police surveillance. He returned to Italy at the end of the year to perform his military service.

He found his mother worn and weary. She embraced him for the last time, ever more anxious about the future of her twenty-one-year-old son who, after so long an absence, appeared before her lusty and strong and then vanished once more.

He was assigned to the Bersaglieri regiment stationed at Verona in the Castelvechio barracks, and was, of course, received with considerable suspicion by his superiors. A lieutenant was entrusted with the duty of keeping an eye on this youth who had been reported as a seditious character, but it was not long before the officer learned to esteem Mussolini the recruit as the best of his soldiers. He proved himself a born Bersagliere, ready, willing in the exercise of his duties, agile and vigorous in athletics. As at Gualtieri on the banks of the Po, he beat all his comrades at Verona in the high jump.

IV

ITALY ONCE MORE

MUSSOLINI was already immersed in that new life when he received a summons from his father : his mother was dying. He was granted furlough and hastened to Dovia. It was still winter; in the comfortless cold of the bare country-side his mother was succumbing to her illness amid the silent sadness of her family. 'I arrived in time to see her still alive,' he wrote, 'but in her death agony. She recognized me by my fez-like cap which she seized several times ; she would have spoken to me, but paralysis prevented her from doing so. In this hour of mourning I bow before the inexorable law which rules human life. I would have sought comfort in this fatalistic thought, but the most comforting philosophic doctrines do not suffice to fill the void left by the irreparable loss of a loved one.'

Years later the Duce of Fascism, remembering that moment, wrote : 'For many days I felt lost. The only living being whom I really loved and who had been near to me had been torn from me, the only soul eternally linked to my quivering spirit.' No attempt at consolation succeeded in filling 'even to the smallest extent that limitless void, nor to open for the fraction of an inch that closed door. My mother had suffered for me in many ways. She had lived through so many anxious hours on

account of my wayward and bellicose life. She had predicted my ascent, she had worked and hoped too much, and had died before reaching the age of forty-six. . . . She might still be living and enjoying my political success with the strength of motherly love.'

Rosa Maltoni died on February 19, 1905. To the condolences sent to him by his captain Mussolini replied in a proud tone which reveals the patriotic revolutionary fervour inherited from his father :

'Of the scores of letters which I have had lately many will be thrown into the fire because they merely repeat the usual conventional expressions. But I shall keep yours, Signor Capitano, as one of the dearest memories of my life. Now, as you say so truly, there is nothing for me to do but to follow my mother's counsel and honour her memory by fulfilling all my duties as a soldier and a citizen. Lengthy wailings and tears may be suited to women, but strong men should know how to suffer and die in silence, rather than weep ; they should act, act following the path of virtue, honour the family memories and those still more sacred ones of the fatherland, not with bootless lamenting but with worthy deeds. It is good to remember and commemorate the heroes who by shedding their blood cemented the unity of the country ; but it is better still to prepare ourselves so as not to prove unworthy descendants of them.'

Captain Simonetti, a retired colonel, who died in 1938, was often received at Palazzo Venezia by his former Bersagliere and liked to tell that the Duce always escorted him to the door of the vast hall in which he worked ; he would bid him an affectionate farewell, but then give him a disciplined military salute. 'He wished to show me,' wrote Simonetti,

'that did he not forget that I was his old captain.'

Mussolini returned to his regiment at Verona and then at Peschiera, and obtained his discharge in September 1906 after twenty-one months' service. He went back to Dovia, where his father was living through sad days, no longer a militant politician, and physically depressed. He had become an innkeeper, and was in the habit of dallying in the evening with his son in the deserted shop and reading Machiavelli.

But Benito was not the sort of youth to adapt himself to the soporific atmosphere of that rustic existence. He could always exploit his diploma as a teacher. Thus we find him in mid-November teaching in the school of Caneva di Tolmezzo (in the Friuli) with a salary of 52 lire (£2 1s.) a month. The clear, luminous air of the Carnia mountains exhilarated him, and he gave vent to the vital exuberance of his youth by climbing mountains, crossing the Tagliamento, ever on the move through the country-side. Many were the serenades which he sang to the village maidens in the lively parentheses of distraction between his school hours and those very long ones which he devoted to reading. On February 17, 1907, at the request of the crowd, as at Gualtieri, he delivered a speech commemorating Giordano Bruno,¹ then the hero of the Leftists and the anti-Clericals.

Not on this account alone was his stay at Caneva similar to his life at Gualtieri; the sympathy of his pupils and the people, and the hostility of the

¹ Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), a philosopher, executed for heresy in Rome after having been tried and condemned by the Inquisition. He was extolled by the Italian anti-Clericals and Freemasons in the nineteenth century as the hero and martyr of free thought, and demonstrations in his honour often led to riots and attacks on the Church.

administrators of the municipality were repeated. Thus at Caneva, as at Gualtieri, at the end of the school year he decided to migrate before being dismissed for turbulence.

He wandered about for a few months and then turned up at Dovia again at his father's house in September of that same year, 1907, and remained there constantly busy with his political readings and his solitary meditations, occasionally going from his native village to Forlì where he found refuge in the library. 'I see him,' wrote Antonio Beltramelli, 'always, or nearly always, alone, crossing the broad piazza of Forlì, avoiding the arcades, perhaps because he had no wish to meet people who annoyed him; his collar was turned up, his hat crushed down over his eyes, his head low. He had grown a thick black beard and his face was pale. When he raised his eyes one could perceive a steel-like will rising out of their deep light. His eyes were impenetrable. He could see into us without giving away anything of himself. He remained definitely alien to everything around him. Not always, however, for if anything pleased him his countenance suddenly altered, and then, almost as by a miracle, on that face marked by lines of a manly hardness there gleamed a childlike smile.'

He took French lessons in order to be able to undergo an examination entitling him to teach that language, and in November he went up to the University of Bologna. He happened on that day to enter the hall where the examiners were gathered, absent-mindedly with a cigarette in his mouth. This caused immediate scandal and reproofs. 'Standing rigidly on his feet, his eyes wide open, he recovered from his distraction, and throwing away his cigarette, exclaimed: "Of course, I had

forgotten that I was in an academy." But soon after he showed himself so thoroughly prepared and endowed with such sound culture that the examiners easily forgot his trifling misdemeanour.'

In the following months he began to tour the agricultural centres of the province for propaganda meetings, always contending with the Republican Party, which was then predominant in the Forlì district. In the course of the speech he said to those dogged opponents, fiercely jealous of their electoral fiefs: "What do you imagine that my life has been up to now if not a perpetual battle for the conquest of truth?"

In 1908 his position had not improved. He therefore had to make up his mind to rely once more on his diplomas for his livelihood. He went to Oneglia as teacher of French in a private school; at the same time he again took up journalism, and Lucio Serrati appointed him editor of the Socialist paper *La lima*. Mussolini came to the flowery Riviera at the beginning of March, while Edmondo De Amicis was dying there, and in his paper he extolled the humane idealism of the author of *Cuore*, then the most popular book in Italy. He concluded his article as follows:

'Should men's minds be completely absorbed by idiotic and mean business; should life, in a more or less near future, have no other aim than the satisfaction of material needs? If so, we pilgrims of the ideal shall withdraw into the distant Thebais to preserve the last hopes, the supreme illusions, the memories of our dead in the vasty silence of the desert.'

He remained at Oneglia only a few months. That was the most peaceful period of his existence in spite of the fact that he was immediately followed

by police reports and the local authorities were instructed to keep close watch on him. He was nevertheless very active in the journalistic field, often engaged in polemics with the organs of other parties and was quite explicit in setting forth his own resolute principles: 'For us ideas are not abstract entities but physical forces. When an idea seeks expression in the world it does so through nervous muscular and physical manifestations.'

With the end of this school year Mussolini brought his teaching career (which he had begun three times—in the Po valley, amid the Carnic Alps, and by the shores of the Ligurian Sea) to its final conclusion. In Romagna the political struggle was growing in intensity and friends and comrades summoned him to take part in it. Once more he returned to Dovia in the warm season in which he was born. He was then twenty-five years old and his spirit was ready for the fray.

V

THE IRREDENTIST SOCIALIST

JULY 1908. The political campaign in Italy was then just emerging from that slough of despond which Alfredo Oriani and Giosuè Carducci had constantly denounced in their writings. The new generations were pressing against the old, advancing towards new goals, although as yet unconscious of the great future awaiting them. In the Socialist world of Forlì Mussolini was coming to be known for the definite resoluteness of his revolutionary concept transpiring from his every act, in spite of his periodical absences. He now arrived in the midst of an acute phase of the agrarian struggle between landlords, peasants, and day labourers, between Republican and the Socialist unions. The Socialist workers wished to prevent the wheat from being threshed by means of the machines conducted by the half-share farmers; the struggle went through episodes of violence. Mussolini at once took the lead in the agitation, and he even had occasion to threaten a workers' organizer who did not show solidarity with his comrades. He was consequently arrested. In the red light of a summer sunset friends came to warn him that the police were arriving. At that moment he was reading a book, and without being disturbed he said: "Let me get to the end of the chapter and I'll be with you."

He remained in prison for a fortnight. As soon

as he was set free he wrote some observations on the motives of the agrarian struggle then going on, with a clarity of ideas unknown to the 'experts' studying the problem, because in him observation was always accompanied by action. Then he went back to Nietzsche and devoted a complete essay to the subject, which appeared at the end of the year in the *Pensiero romagnolo*. The young revolutionary's interpretation ended as follows: 'Nietzsche sounds the réveille of an early return to the ideal. But it will be an ideal fundamentally different from those in which the past generations believed. To understand it, "free spirits" of a new type will arise fortified in war, in solitude, in great danger, spirits who will have had experience of the winds, the ice, the snows of the high mountains, and will know how to measure with their serene outlook the depths of the abyss.' More than an interpretation of Nietzsche, there is in this vision a veritable prophecy.

Amid the squabbles of provincial life and of economic struggles the youthful agitator looked high and far. Already he had secured the confidence of many workers who were impressed by the manner in which he was ever ready to face the music; but from time to time he would withdraw far from the madding crowd to commune with the great spirits of the past. In September 1908 he went to Ravenna to visit the tomb of Dante, while the unredeemed Italians from Trieste and Trento had come there to light a perpetual flame before it. Soon after he crossed the frontier once more, still seeking his road, and arrived at Trento to work in the shadow of Dante's statue.¹

Even before he arrived the weekly paper which

¹ The monument to Dante in Trento came to symbolize the Irredentist spirit, the yearning for *italianità*, which under Austria could be expressed in no other way.



Photo Luce

MUSSOLINI AMONG THE FARM WORKERS

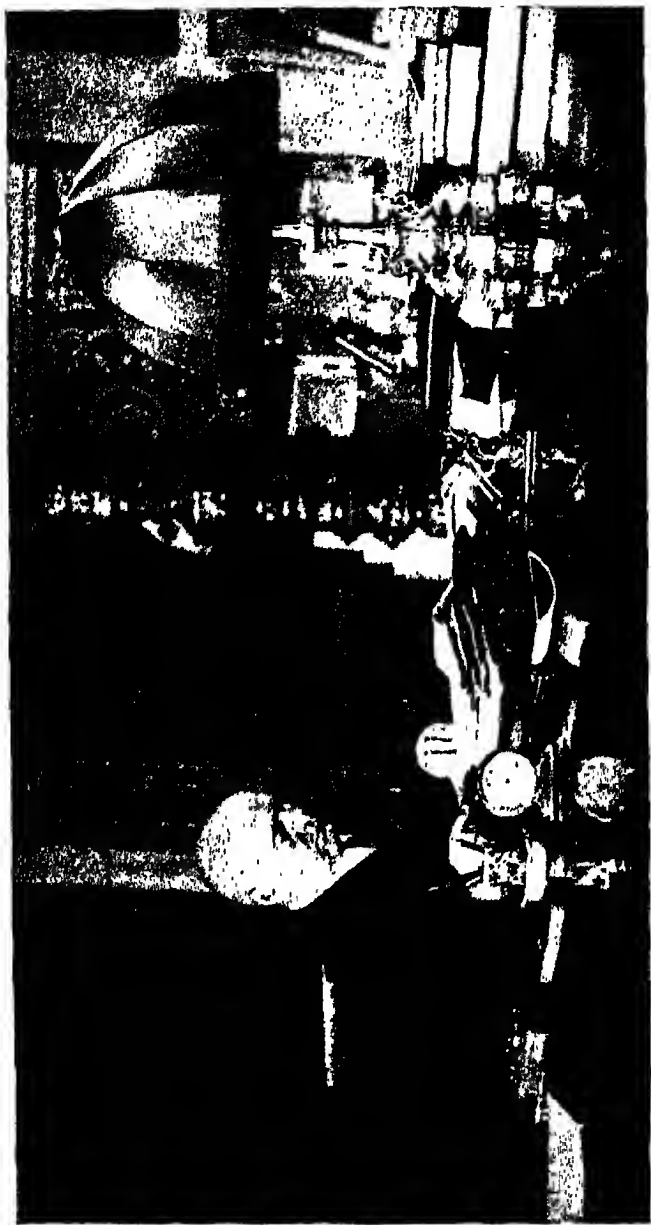


Photo Luce

THE PRIME MINISTER AT WORK IN PALAZZO VENEZIA

he had been called upon to edit, *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, introduced to the comrades of the Trentino the young Romagnol to whom the local Labour Secretariat had been entrusted. He was described as 'a highly educated young man, who knows the German language perfectly, to the great advantage of our movement.'

Austrian Socialism was something essentially different from that of Italy; there was nothing revolutionary in it, and between it and the Habsburg State there was nothing like that abyss which in Italy not even the predominant Reformist group had been able to fill. In the Liberal, Clerical, or Socialist Trento the Romagnol revolutionary, exasperated by the local custom of holding propaganda lectures in beer-shops, did not feel too satisfied. Indeed in his first days in the city he meditated resigning the tasks entrusted to him and earning his living by giving private lessons. But at Trento there was Cesare Battisti, editor of the daily paper *Il Popolo*, whose printing offices also published *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*, and Battisti, a proud independent spirit, thoroughly Italian in feeling, attracted Mussolini as no other personality encountered throughout his many peregrinations had ever done. The esteem and the sympathy were at once mutual. When Mussolini, in February 1909, soon after his arrival, commemorated Giordano Bruno, he not only astonished his popular audience but even the highly intellectual Battisti, who said of him: 'He is a scholar, a convinced enthusiast, who was able to infuse into his really fine lecture the fruit of his studies, the strength of his convictions and the enthusiasm of a man who has faith, who supports that faith and is determined to imbue others with it.'

In a few weeks Mussolini's actions became so intense as to shake the local atmosphere of inertia. Organizer, orator, journalist and narrator in turn, he passed from the printing press to the libraries, from literary production to violent polemics, frequently ending in prison. The Austrian authorities in fact, like those of Italy, instinctively realized that he was sincere when he stated, as he did in his commemoration of Karl Marx in March: 'It is no longer a question of studying the world. It has got to be transformed.' As if that were not enough, this young man did not appear in the least inclined to repudiate his fatherland. The Austrian authorities were perfectly ready to tolerate an internationalist, however extreme; but they at once became suspicious when they read a phrase of Mussolini's such as the following: 'Italy is preparing to fill a new epoch in the history of the world with herself.' Such language did not at all fit in with the views of the police. The confiscation of various issues of Mussolini's paper began.

A Clerical organ defined him a 'scamp,' to which he replied: 'They could not make me a more acceptable compliment. Only, I fear that I am unworthy of belonging to that band of scamps, of naughty scamps who have left trace of themselves in history. I should like to be a scamp like Gavroche, that romantic creation of Victor Hugo's genius. I should like to imitate Balilla, that plebeian Genoese whom you Austrians cannot have forgotten.'¹

But 'in order to become a good scamp I spend

¹ Balilla was a Genoese boy, who while the Austrians were in possession of the city in 1746 and oppressing the citizens, cast a stone at a detachment of their troops, thereby giving the signal for a rebellion which drove the hated foreigner from the city. The name Balilla was afterwards to be given to the Fascist youth organization and its members.

many hours in the library, bent over the grey pages of old books ; to become a good scamp I am not averse from reading Christian and even Catholic books.'

But *suum cuique* ; soon after here is an essay by that 'scamp' against the democracy of those days and of all time : 'Who says democracy says an omnium gatherum of low-grade professional politicians, lawyers in search of clients, professors intriguing to secure university chairs, journalists trying to get something out of the secret service funds, speculators who buy silence, and judges, uneasy in their consciences, who pose as anti-Clericals, but within the bosom of Freemasonry which has now become a universal association of grafters.'

Whatever political or social arguments Mussolini touched on in this Trentino period of his career, he always brought to bear on them what was to be his future outlook as a constructor and a fighter. His unswerving granite-like consistency gave a definite character to the words of his youth.

In the second half of June, in consequence of a lawsuit arising out of recent polemics, he was condemned to eight days' imprisonment. As he entered his prison cell he said : "The first period of my summer holiday has begun," realizing that his Odyssey would continue, as in fact it did, with intervals, until his final expulsion from Austrian territory. On that occasion Mussolini took advantage of his time in gaol to study the writings of Georges Sorel. On being set free he resumed his work, his polemics, and his literary studies on Ulrich von Platen, Klopstock, and Schiller.

In that summer of 1909 the explorer Peary reached the North Pole, the Duke of the Abruzzi attained the highest point of the Himalayas,

Blériot flew across the Channel. All these instances of enterprising pluck filled Mussolini with enthusiasm, for he was a new man, modern and classical at the same time, and they led him to announce the coming defeat of the 'prophets of immobility.' He wrote that, contrary to all appearances, 'our age is a heroic one, perhaps more so than the ancient ones. Mercantilism has not suffocated the anguished but salutary enthusiasm for research ; to-day, as in the mythical days of the Argonauts, man feels a yearning for great achievements.'

In August, Battisti appointed Mussolini managing editor of his paper and presented him to his readers as a thoroughly sound man who would accept no compromise. Mussolini's activity was redoubled and was not even interrupted in his periods of prison. During his second arrest he read Maupassant and Stirner ; during his third he wrote an article on the grave problem of unemployment which he regarded as intimately associated with the capitalist system. 'Disorder is the normal state of capitalist economy,' he wrote ; 'the blind oscillations of the economic complex also produce violent shocks (crises), which hold up for a given time the normal productive process and intensify poverty and suffering.' The Duce was to speak not very differently during the great depression which broke out in 1929. In his earlier article he had advocated State intervention to regulate economic life, 'to stimulate, protect, and implement the initiative of individuals and organizations.' He also denounced the phenomenon of the decline of population as one of the main symptoms of the decay of nations.

After the legal proceedings instituted against Mussolini, the condemnations, the seizure of his paper, all of which measures proved unable to

stop his activities, the police tried to find a good excuse to rid the country of the agitator once for all. During a police search in the offices of the Liberal newspaper *L'Alto Adige*, in the editor's drawer a letter from Mussolini was found proposing common action to his colleague and qualifying as idiotic a phrase recently pronounced by the Austrian public prosecutor : ' Italy ends at Ala.'¹ If the Romagnol agitator was in agreement with the Irredentists in maintaining that Italy did not end at Ala, Vienna could no longer show any tolerance for the Socialist Mussolini. Hence a new trial at Rovereto, where Mussolini had been conducted as a prisoner. He was acquitted by the Court, but a decree of expulsion ' from all the lands and kingdoms of the Austrian Empire ' followed at once.

The action of the Austrian authorities, however, could not be carried out in the shadow of the ordinary administrative procedure ; the Italian papers in Trento protested, the city was in a state of ferment and its walls were instantly covered with posters. Cesare Battisti in person organized a protest demonstration which developed into a general strike, the first and the last strike ever inspired by political rather than economic reasons that took place in the Trentino at that period. On September 26, 1909, Mussolini was sent to the frontier under escort, but he remained ever more convinced that the frontier must be eliminated, and his name resounded as far as the Brenner.

After a short stay in Verona he returned to Forlì, where his father was lying ill. He was now back in his own Romagna, twenty-six years old, having had experience of life through many dramatic vicissitudes, after having been rejected from all sides—

¹ The pre-war Austro-Italian frontier station.

from the college at Faenza, from Gualtieri, from Switzerland, from the Carnia, from Oneglia, and now from Austria. He concentrated once more on his studies, which filled his days of desolate solitude, of silent and irritated bitterness, surrounded by very few friends and by many opponents. Nevertheless, he continued to write for Battisti's *Popolo*; inveighing against the dominant Giolittian¹ mediocrity. In those invectives and in his forecast that 'soon a salutary breath of wind will sweep away Giolitti and all that he stands for and the spineless semi-demi Socialistic ideology which has reviled pure Socialism,' Mussolini took over the spiritual heritage of Alfredo Oriani, his great fellow-Romagnol who in those very days lay dying in the desperate solitude of the Cardello. Those same mediocrities who had dubbed Oriani a madman, began to call Mussolini a lunatic. This, of course, was only natural. The mob always opposes precursors until they triumph. Oriani, like Crispi, had not won; but Mussolini was destined to win, and as the Duce of Fascism was to define Oriani his only precursor when Italy recognized in the son of the Dovia blacksmith the man whose coming Oriani had predicted. 'The master of to-morrow will be he who will best give expression to the pride of the new ideal, for the fatherland which cannot die will continue to look backwards and on high, until from its midst another great figure shall emerge to show us the way which shall be followed by the twentieth century.'

In the meanwhile the young revolutionary, already well known even in foreign countries, was reduced to the semi-idleness of a country town, without any work with which to give vent to his

¹ Giovanni Giolitti, many times Prime Minister and practically dictator of Parliament. He opposed Italy's intervention in the war as he had no confidence in his own people.

exuberant energy. He then first met the woman who was to be his companion for life, and he continued his spiritual preparation. But he seemed to feel almost as one buried alive. He wrote articles the publication of which was delayed, and even a novel for Battisti's *Popolo*. He protested when he learned that he was to be substituted as chief *rédacteur* of the paper by Vasilico Vergani, a sinister individual in whom he already sensed the future traitor of Battisti, the Trento martyr. He read Schopenhauer, and wrote for *La Voce* of Florence a book containing his most recent experiences, *Il Trentino visto da un Socialista*, which was also the Trentino seen from an Italian point of view. But not even with the Florentine intellectuals, who were giving new life to Italian culture with such publications as *Il Leonardo*, *Il Regno*, *La Voce*, did he contract intimate ties. At the end of 1909, ever more detached from any clique or group, his mind was winnowing his past experiences and rejecting all outside influences.

VI

THE SOCIALIST LEADER

HE christened his daughter Edda, the first-born of his marriage in his very modest Forlì home. In the meanwhile his Socialist comrades realized, without any action on his part, that they had in him an efficient and necessary element for reviving the Party and competing successfully with the Republicans, who were still very influential in Romagna. They appointed him secretary of the local Socialist section, and in January 1910, when Andrea Costa¹ died, Mussolini, who had once more entered the political fray with vehemence, founded a weekly paper which was almost wholly written by himself. In *La Lotta di classe* appeared a torch lighted to burn up the old world around it. For months and years the returned emigrant castigated the vices of Italian political life, demolished commonplaces, hurled his invectives against the cowardly and accommodating seditious movement, engaged in polemics with friends and opponents indiscriminately, accepted responsibility for the most foolhardy actions, was both a rebel and a moralizer. Overthrowing sects and conventicles, he won through in every conflict in which he joined issue, and made his authority felt as leader of the revolutionary Socialists. His physical energy enabled him to produce ceaselessly ; his personal unselfishness disarmed almost all hostile

¹ One of the early Socialist leaders and deputies (1851-1910).

attacks. He toured the province for meetings and lectures, strengthened the ties between the various organizations, effected a process of selection and increased their membership without, however, assuming the pose of a demagogue. His every word, his every action gave expression to his deep moral seriousness, his absolutely uncompromising attitude, his dramatic conception of life, his qualities as a precursor who leads others and draws them after him without ever being led astray by outside influences. The targets of his attacks were the pinkish reformism of the very leaders of the Socialist Party, the claim of the Republicans to hegemony, the cheap political trickery of the Clericals, the arm-chair immobility of the Giolitti Government which corrupted the masses through elections, and the servile indolence of Parliament. He was indeed aiming straight away at a definite revolution of Italian life.

The programme of his paper was as follows :

‘ We shall be ruthless with charlatans to whatever party they may profess to belong, whenever they go among the masses of workers to secure applause, votes, salaries and clients. Socialism is not a business matter for merchants, it is not a politicians’ game and still less a form of sport. It is an effort towards moral and material elevation, individual and collective.’ He applied these principles to the letter and by means of his personal example. At a congress in which he produced documentary evidence of the results of his work and the circulation attained by his *Lotta di classe*, he was offered an increase of salary over the 4 lire per day on which he eked out a precarious existence. He refused, saying : “ I do not wish to become a parasite of the Socialist organization.” Naturally he also opposed

an agitation which had then arisen to secure an increased allowance for Members of Parliament.

In the very rapid rhythm of his work he neglected his personal appearance. His friends on one occasion had succeeded in inducing him to get a new suit of clothes, of which he was really in need ; but before putting it on he stamped on it and crumpled it lest he should appear too smart ! He exacted an active collaboration on the part of his comrades. The general tendency towards Sunday diversions, dances, games and copious drinks in the wine-shops caused him intense exasperation.

While he was in correspondence with Sorel, the theorist of violence, he warned the trade unionists not to give way to the temptations of passion which in the frequent encounters with the Republicans often led to bloody brawls and even killings. Soon his fame spread far beyond the Romagna, and even crossed the Atlantic, so much so that one day he received an enthusiastic greeting from a group of unknown Romagnol workers who had emigrated to America.

He was always having a shy at the professional lawyer-politicians. ' All these people who torture the law-codes as the priests torture the Gospel, are trying to gain possession of the Monarchical Savoy State, which had been Cæsarean in the easy-going days of King Humbert and is now, under the pressure of the pettifogging lawyers, becoming democratic and *bloccardo*. Every department of the mastodontic State administration absorbs lawyers ; those who do not succeed in becoming minor clerks in the Ministries and Prefectures end up as employees of the police departments or as journalists. It is no paradox to say that the lawyers will devour Italy.'

To the very prudent doctrinaire Reformists who dominated the Party and were congregated in Milan for a congress, Mussolini appeared a terrible heretic. In fact, he soon came into conflict with them in connexion with the principles to be applied in the agrarian struggle in Romagna. As his ideas did not prevail, he cut matters short, returned his membership card and declared the Forlì section autonomous, smiting 'the pseudo-intellectuals of academic positivism who looked on all ideal attempts with a smirk of measureless asininity.' He stated further: 'To the obedient and resigned herd which follows its shepherd and disperses in all directions at the first cry of the wolves, we prefer the small resolute, audacious nucleus, which gives reason for its faith, knows what it wants and pushes straight ahead towards its objectives.'

He now promoted a new agrarian struggle in the interest of the agricultural labourers against the powerful Republican organization, and threatening processions of rival groups met in the streets of Forlì at the risk of bloody conflicts. He took part in arduous debates. He shouted to his adversaries: "You may beat me, but you shall hear me." Indeed he always got a hearing, while no one dared to strike him. To those who insulted his honour he replied: "My life is an open book, wherein these words may be read: study, poverty, struggle."

In November 1910 Alessandro Mussolini died. His son, feeling lonelier than ever, followed the funeral procession at the head of a reverent crowd of three thousand people and took over his father's political inheritance with these virile words:

"He has left us no material goods; he has left us one moral asset—the idea."

He inaugurated the year 1911 with a definition of

journalism as he conceived it and practised it :
 'Journalism is for me not a trade but a mission. I am not a journalist for the sake of a salary. If I were, there would have been no lack of better jobs. The newspaper is for us not a sheet which must be filled up every week with whatever comes our way. No. The paper for us is the Party. It is a banner. It is a soul !'

To the comrades who were perpetually demanding amnesties for political prisoners he exclaimed : "Amnesties? What nonsense! We must learn to suffer and wait!" In spite of this essential independence of thought and action and the consequent rebellions against the dominant orthodoxy, he was deeply attached to the Socialist idea which in his mind was identified with the coming revolution. He therefore followed that section of the Party which opposed the Tripoli expedition, and promoted agitations against Giolitti's Government, although always averse to the usual mob-devastations. But he was arrested and imprisoned like his father before him, in the citadel of Forlì. During his cross-examination at the trial he set forth the motives for his conduct which revealed even to his comrades his fundamentally patriotic feeling.

"Because I am an Italian," he declared, "and love the country in which I was born and whose language I speak, I expressed, as a good Italian, on the basis of economic and geographical data, my opinion adverse to this expedition which might gravely prejudice the interests of the proletariat. I want to see an Italy in a position to redeem her sons from their twofold poverty—economic and moral." He concluded : "I tell you, gentlemen of the Court, that if you acquit me you will do me a good turn, because you will give me back

to my work, to society. But if you condemn me you will do me honour, because you are in the presence not of a malefactor, but of one who asserts ideas, of an agitator of consciences, of a soldier of a faith who commands your respect, because he has in himself the presentiments of the future and the great power of truth."

He was condemned to eleven months' imprisonment, and he astonished a friend who deplored the sentence, saying to him brusquely: "If you pity me I shall bash your face in." While awaiting the result of his appeal, he spent his days in the icy prison cell, reading and discussing with the other prisoners. When between Christmas and New Year 1912 his wife Rachele¹ came to greet him within the gloomy keep, he comforted her with a virile presage: "Other times will come: our times!"

He was transferred handcuffed to the Bologna prison and shut up together with common criminals. Not until February was his sentence reduced to six months, which came to an end in March. He was detained in the Forlì citadel, and spent the time in a study of *John Hus the truth-speaker*, which was afterwards published and also translated into Czech.

Many weak spirits emerge despondent from such ordeals; not so Mussolini, for he returned to the fray more impetuous than ever, as if prison life had brought him to maturity. He immediately imposed himself as a leader at the Socialist congress which met at Reggio Emilia in July. He there revealed himself in the national field. The parts were now inverted, and he succeeded in getting the representatives of the Reformist wing, such as Bissolati,²

¹ Rachele Guidi.

² Formerly a Republican, then a Socialist, and one of the founders of the Party and first editor of the *Avanti!* He was Minister without portfolio during the War.

Cabrini,¹ Bonomi,² and Podrecca,³ expelled, and was himself nominated member of the governing body of the Party.

The death of his father freed him from all ties with his native province. In December the young agitator was entrusted with the editorship of the *Avanti!* the official organ of the Party, and in France, Georges Sorel commented on him with the now well-known words: 'Your Mussolini is no ordinary Socialist. Believe me, one day perhaps you will see him at the head of a sacred battalion, saluting with his sword the Italian flag. He is an Italian of the fifteenth century, a *condottiero*. We do not yet know, but he is the only man of energy capable of repairing the weaknesses of the Government.'

The new editor of the *Avanti!* was not yet thirty years of age when he came to live in the great industrial city of Milan with its masses of working men. He decided to reorganize the paper, and he began by getting rid of certain pedantic collaborators who had reduced it to a tiresome academy of theoretical debates which only interested a few readers. The thoroughly personal method of editing adopted by Mussolini disconcerted his comrades but gave new life to the paper, the circulation of which soon rose to 100,000 copies, and restored to it once more its function as an organ for moulding opinion. He advocated extremist tendencies, but was always the first to take upon himself the gravest responsibilities. To every objection he replied: "I am the editor"; he was a very special kind of editor, who had on assuming his editorship demanded a *reduction* of salary.

When during a riot between the police and the

¹ He founded the first Labour Exchange.

² Afterwards Prime Minister.

³ Politician, journalist, and composer.

inhabitants of Roccagorga in the province of Rome, several persons were killed or wounded, Mussolini protested vigorously. In his speech at the trial in defence of what he had written he declared : " I do not regret and never shall regret having written those articles when the news of the Roccagorga incident was telegraphed. I wanted the derelicts of Roccagorga to realize that they, derelict Italians, had other Italians by their side who understood the full extent of their misfortune. And I should like those who govern Italy and also those who in Italy let themselves be governed to reflect on the social significance of this debate. Having said this I beg you, gentlemen of the jury, to acquit the *gerente*.¹ As we the authors of the offence are here, there is no reason why the *gerente* should be condemned ; I also beg you to acquit the other persons implicated in the matter with myself. It comes to this, that I am the only party responsible, both for what I have written myself and for what I have allowed others to write. Hence all the weight of the law should fall on my head ; I am not innocent because I have been condemned before, not generically, but specifically, and I shall probably commit similar offences again ; indeed I undertake to do so almost as a debt of honour. I do not care in the least whether you acquit me or condemn me. Prison is really quite a tolerable condition. A Russian proverb says that to be a full man one must have spent four years at a secondary school, two at a university, and two in prison. He who is in too frequent contact with others every now and then feels the necessity of being alone."

¹ Under the old Italian Press law there was a member of the staff known as the *gerente responsabile*, who answered for all offences committed by the paper and might be sent to prison for them. He was a mere figure-head, paid for the job, but who wrote not a line.

In spite of a certain harshness of temperament and a tendency to isolate himself, inspired by his deep pessimism on the basic qualities of mankind, the Socialist masses saw in him the valour of the most peerless of paladins. At a Party congress at Forlì, where he went to report on his past activity, someone defined him as 'the man who has been our fearless Duce for three years.' This was the first time that he was called the 'Duce,' the title by which he will go down to history.

The mystic confidence expressed in his words, the poverty, honesty, and independence of his life, the irresistible impulse of his activity fascinated everyone. In July 1913 an article reached the *Avanti!* offices from Switzerland beginning with these words:

'During the last few days the workers of Bern felt that they had reached the seventh heaven. Just think! Mussolini has arrived! Expectation was almost spasmodic and assumed two forms: there were those who awaited Mussolini to see him once more after ten years, to see him a grown man after having last seen him little more than a boy, eighteen years old; there were others, the younger generation, who were waiting to see him at last in the flesh, this terrible revolutionary who actually talks of the possibility of an insurrection.'

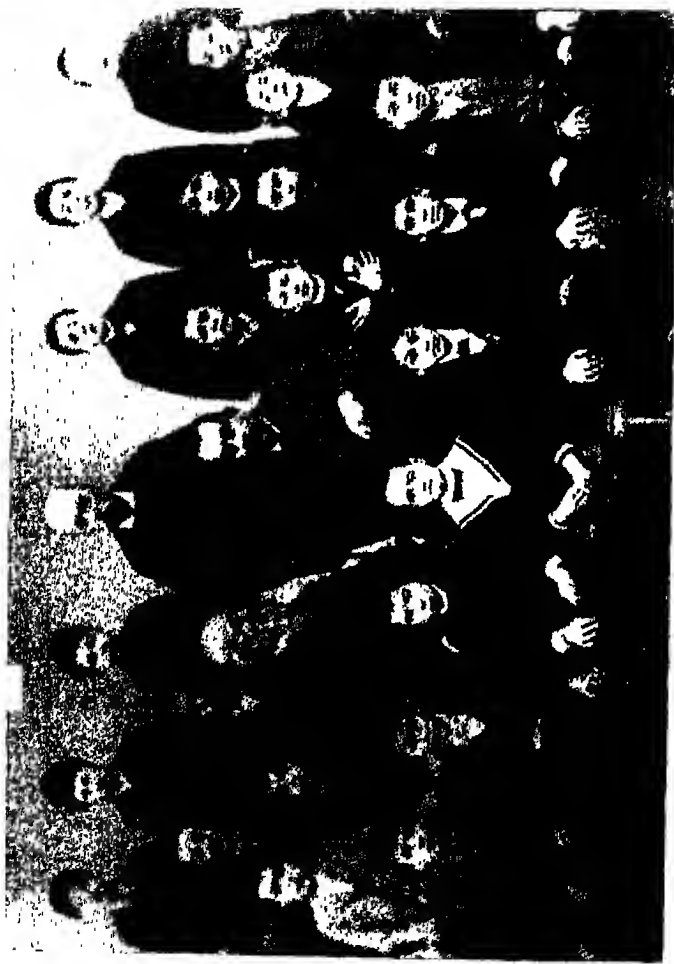
Nor was this enough. After the Tripoli expedition and the Balkan wars, his unique sensitiveness, which might be called his social rhabdomanacy, gave him a presentiment that a world war was coming, the tragic prelude to the long awaited world revolution, while all around him the great high priests of internationalism continued ingenuously to prophesy peace for all eternity.

Mussolini continued to live a life of greater hard-



Photo Luce

H.M. THE KING VISITING MUSSOLINI'S BIRTHPLACE AT PREDAPPIO



MUSSOLINI AS A BOY AMONG HIS SCHOOL MATES (in the centre of the first row)
Photo Luce

ships than ever, lacking the bare necessities, indifferent to trifling Party squabbles, and deliberately ignoring the ordinary details of administration. Yet he was acutely sensitive to the most recondite symptoms, to the imponderables whereby future situations could be predicted. The parliamentary system was his *bête noire*, even while he had to tour the country for propaganda purposes in view of the coming general election. He indulged in such drastic definitions as the following : "The Italian Chamber of Deputies is a covered market," or "a crook." He constantly repeated : "We are firmly convinced that the decisive battles will be fought out in the streets and squares, when men and the times are ripe."

In the proceedings for the Roccagorga affair Mussolini was acquitted. He returned to his desk at the *Avanti !*, but the endless petty slavery of an official organ irritated him. In order to have a more personal and independent instrument at his disposal he founded and issued a review of his own entitled *Utopia*.

In May 1914 he attended the Socialist congress at Ancona, determined to get the whole of the Party to adopt that ban against the Freemasons which at the same time as the Nationalist group he had already enforced in the Forlì federation. It was known that a redoubtable orator, Orazio Raimondo,¹ was going to conduct the case for Freemasonry to which he belonged. In fact, that bewitching speaker delivered an oration drawing supporters and neutrals after him. But the assembly eventually decided as Mussolini wished, after the young editor of the *Avanti !* had replied with the hard effectiveness of his clear-cut arguments. "A man," he said,

¹ Socialist deputy and lawyer, afterwards expelled from the Party.

"who joins Freemasonry is subject to the oddest changes. It is well known that certain animals when kept in the dark lose their fur. This phenomenon is easily explained. Put a hero together with a thousand mean-spirited individuals, and you will make a coward of him ; put a coward amongst a thousand heroes and his pusillanimity will be shaken ; especially those who are over forty no longer see things with the eye of enthusiasm, but rather with that of scepticism. The bank and Freemasonry are synonymous." Inspired solely by his constant ideal preoccupations he affirmed in May, at Cesena : "The many scandals in every country prove that the governing classes are no longer fit for their duties. Morality is now declining and is substituted by a cynicism which perverts our sensitiveness. Religion is succeeded by dishonest business."

He was convinced that only a violent upheaval could radically overturn the situation ; but his sense of realism did not permit him to harbour too many illusions as to the outcome of that disorderly uprising without responsible leaders which suddenly broke out in June like a summer thunderstorm, spreading from Ancona to various parts of the peninsula. It was known as ' the Red week ' (*la settimana rossa*) and reached its zenith in Romagna, where railway communications were interrupted, shops devastated, fowls were sold for a few pennies, ' trees of Liberty ' set up, a priest stripped, and several policemen killed. Mussolini did not quit Milan. He advocated health-giving, surgical violence, but not ' movements of an 1848 character.'¹ Indeed, when a general was held up and disarmed he expressed open

¹ In Italy revolutionaries and agitators of a romantic and unpractical nature are known as ' forty-eighters.'

disapproval of such action. The authorities had given way, but it was enough for Admiral Cagni¹ to appear on the scene with a handful of naval ratings to extinguish the fires of revolt. Then the outbreak collapsed everywhere.

While the *bourgeoisie* was recovering from the panic into which this domestic cyclone had thrown it, another very different storm was brewing over Europe, having been announced by the lightning flash from Serajevo.

The Italian Government, not having been forewarned of the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia and in the face of the subsequent declarations of war, promptly detached itself from the bonds with the Central Powers on the grounds that there had been no aggression by Serbia, no previous consultations, and no adequate compensation. The attitude on the part of Italy proved of immediate and decisive advantage for France, allowing her to withdraw her troops from the Alps and concentrate her every effort on the Marne front.

Italian neutrality secured unanimous approval in the country, but each political group at once proceeded to examine it from its own point of view in relation to the future. Mussolini, among the Socialists, was from the beginning the most dogged supporter of neutrality, not as signifying inertia or fear of risk, but as excluding any assistance to Austria, who still held the unredeemed Italian lands. As the International had failed in its objects and the proletarians of the various Powers ranged themselves submissively in the ranks of the opposing armies, he approved the gesture of the Frenchman Hervé, the ex-anti-militarist who volunteered to fight in defence

¹ A distinguished naval officer and explorer. He effected the landing at Tripoli in 1911, and occupied Pola at the end of the World War.

of his country. It was not long before this contingent and dynamic neutralism of Mussolini's came into conflict with the timid mean-spirited Utopian neutrality of his Party ; the Socialists, provided they could reject any possibility of intervention, were indeed determined to assist passively at the European tragedy, even if such an attitude were to contribute to the victory of those very Central Powers to which they were opposed on principle. They did not even allow themselves to be affected by the example of the Garibaldians¹ who hastened to fight for France in the Argonne while Italy was still neutral, or by the openly declared interventionism of Syndicalists such as Alceste De Ambris,² or Corridoni.³ Blindly attached to its old doctrinaire prejudices, Italian Socialism felt no repugnance at finding itself side by side with Conservatives and with other groups of neutralists, the Giolittian Parliamentary *camarilla* included.

¹ They were a body of men who wished to carry out Garibaldi's principles in defence of countries invaded by foreign foes. These Italian volunteers in France were commanded by five of Giuseppe Garibaldi's grandsons, two of whom were killed in action.

² Syndical leader and active interventionist.

³ Syndicalist and interventionist, he was killed in the War.

VII

INTERVENTION

FACED by the dilemma of the War, Mussolini's independent spirit went through a deep crisis. For some time he had realized that revolution could only be the consequence of a war fought by the whole nation after so long a period of inertia. War alone could consolidate the unity and safeguard the independence of Italy from foreign influences and light up once more, through the burning fiery furnace of sacrifice, a new ideal.

While he was trying to shake the inertia of the Party, so different from its original uncompromising attitude, he revealed his innate travail during a polemic with *Libero Tancredi*.¹ Finally he broke away and burnt his bridges without, however, accepting the contrasting ideologies of certain interventionists. 'I refuse to exalt the war of the Triple Entente as a revolutionary, democratic, or Socialist war, according to the common current opinion in Masonic and Reformist circles. As for Italy's intervention, it is a question to be examined now from a national point of view pure and simple.' He never discarded his practical sense, not even in the days of his own personal tragedy when the roseate, sentimental, humanitarian, and idealistic arguments of the democracies appealing for help would have

¹ Pseudonym for Massinco Rocca, politician and journalist.

aided and justified him before the masses in his break with the Party.

In October 1914 Mussolini finally announced his conversion. Before the leaders of the Party gathered together in Bologna, he repeated his appeal already contained in a recently-published article : " Do we wish to remain, as men and as Socialists, idle spectators of this grandiose drama ? Or do we not wish to become, in some way and in some sense, protagonists of it ? " He warned his comrades to avoid allowing the letter to kill the spirit. But it was in vain. He realized that he was talking to men obstinate and obtuse in their deafness. His argument was rejected, whereupon, renouncing all rights of appeal, he cut short the discussion and resigned from the editorship of the *Avanti !* without even demanding the liquidation to which he was entitled and of which he was indeed in dire need.

In Milan he spoke once more : " The vanquished will have a history, but not the absent. If Italy will remain absent she will be once more ' the land of the dead.' "¹ He shut himself up once more amid the insolent abuse of his comrades, who, incapable of understanding him, accused him of treachery and regarded him as a man whose career was definitely ended.

But he was more alive than ever, and in the uproar of execration he prepared for a dash forward towards a new and independent life all his own. He at once felt the need of a personal platform, and within a few days he had founded a new daily paper without a printing press of its own, without capital, and with a volunteer staff composed almost entirely of Socialists who had accepted his ideas. Thus, on that

¹ This is an allusion to Lamartini's definition of Italy as ' the land of the dead '.

foggy morning of November 15, 1914, the first issue of the *Popolo d'Italia* appeared in the streets, and was eagerly purchased and read. The new Socialist daily had on its heading two mottoes of Blanqui and Napoleon: 'He who has steel has bread,' and 'Revolution is an idea which has found bayonets.' The leading article was entitled 'Audacity,' a watchword addressed 'to you, young men of Italy, young men of the workshops and of the universities, young in years and in spirit, who belong to the generation to whom destiny has entrusted the making of history! To you do I address my opening appeal.'

Exasperated by this most audacious challenge, Mussolini's old comrades, although well aware of his rigid honesty, brought against him the charge of having been corrupted, and on November 24 they expelled him from the Party amid threats and insults. Pale and reticent, his eyes ablaze, he came before the Party alone, and, although frequently interrupted by insults, he spoke words worthy of a seer: "To-day you hate me because you still love me," and he concluded: "I tell you, that from this very moment I shall have no compunction, no pity for all those who in this tragic hour do not speak out for fear of the hisses or the shouts of *abbasso*." Outside the hall he added: "I shall have my reward later. These people who have expelled me have me in their blood and love me. They have demolished me because they have not understood me. But one day they will say to me: 'You have been a pioneer and a precursor.'"

A journalist belonging to the Liberal neutralist group called him a Rabagas, but he had by now discarded that temporary character and no longer signed his articles 'L'homme qui cherche' as he had

occasionally done in the *Avanti!* He now found his straight and final path. He no longer felt any doubts. He moved to the attack with irresistible dash. In a speech delivered at Parma before an interventionist audience he stated: "It is blood which makes the ringing wheels of history go round. . . . The neutralists who shout against the War until they are hoarse do not realize what grotesque cowardice there is in such a slogan. It is an abominable irony to shout 'down with the War!' to-day while men are fighting and dying in the trenches. . . . He who attaches too much value to his own skin will not go to fight in the trenches, but neither will you find him on the day of battle in the streets."

It has been rightly said that as a neutralist Mussolini would have been inconceivable. We now find him in fact engaged in agitating the country, in shaking it from its old torpor and driving it towards the decisive ordeal. From the gloomy, wretched offices of his paper, ensconced in the Via Paolo da Cannobio in a quarter of the city near the Piazza del Duomo inhabited by humble people, the inspirer summoned his followers around him. He organized the ranks of his movement, founded the first 'Fasci of Revolutionary action,' so named from the Fasces of ancient Rome, the symbols of authority, implying that a number of persons were closely bound together by ideal ties. At the same time he aroused the groups of the active and willing minority who went into the streets to demonstrate against the neutralists. With his trumpet-like appeals and his straightforward imperious articles he aroused and convinced the doubtful, and drew them after him. The best men of every party looked to him as their only leader. Even those who had been interventionists from the very first moment, recognized him

as the first one of them all—Corridoni, Battisti, Corradini,¹ Federzoni,² Marinetti,³ the Republicans, the Nationalists, the Syndicalists, the Liberals, the Futurists, the Irredentists, the students, the soldiers. A new harmony united all these enthusiasts around Mussolini who had thus become the best beloved and the best hated man in Italy. From his editorial offices amid his voluntary followers, themselves hard pressed by poverty, Mussolini built up the moral preparation for Italy's intervention in the War, influenced the policy of the Government, defeated the parliamentary cunning of Giolitti without ever falling into rhetoric or into the too easy gestures of an irresponsible demagogue. His every word, even the most violent, was always carefully thought in cool meditation. 'Mussolini's intellectual work,' writes one of his biographers, 'is not improvised. The forge of his brain is always at work, but to the majority, even to his intimates, the travail of preparation remains hidden. When he can fix his gaze on a distant bourne, when his face, modelled on broad lines like a piece of antique sculpture, darkens, when he withdraws into his editorial cubby-hole and crumples up newspapers as one crumples up the tablecloth while waiting impatiently for dinner to be served, Mussolini is hammering out his thoughts, he is now forcing them angrily, he is about to impress his living burning form on the dirty and confused matter. Then come his orders, sharp and concise. Gestures. Glances. . . . But his work is not improvised. It seems as if it were, especially when he throws his paper to the

¹ Enrico Corradini, writer and political man; he was one of the founders of the Nationalist Party and of its organ *L'Idea Nazionale*. A vigorous supporter of the Fascist movement, he was raised to the Senate.

² Luigi Federzoni, Nationalist, politician, journalist, President of the Senate until 1939 and now President of the Italian Academy.

³ Founder of *Futurism*.

crowd and the article unwinds every nerve between one word and another, anatomically, as the nerves unwind themselves and wriggle between muscle and muscle. But the work of preparation is deep, I should almost say grave and dignified.'

He demanded that the Triple Alliance Treaty be denounced, he opposed all compromise settlements, he threatened to provoke an accomplished irrevocable fact, and was convinced that the volunteers who had fallen into the Argonne had benefited the cause of intervention more than any number of articles and speeches. Nor did he deceive himself as did many others with regard to the duration and method of the operations. "In my opinion," he said, "I think that in time of war we should leave the fullest freedom to the General Staff. The lawyer-politicians should hold their tongues. . . . But the Italians must have no illusions. They must realize from now on that it will be a question of money and blood. . . . To-day it is war, to-morrow it will be revolution. . . . Woe to those who are absent to-day and to-morrow !"

With the spring the interventionist movement pushed ahead. Mussolini was arrested in Rome together with Marinetti ; this was the last but one of his imprisonments. Set free, he fought one of his many duels with the neutralist Socialist deputy Claudio Treves. After the unveiling of the monument to Garibaldi's Thousand on the rock of Quarto, where Gabriele d'Annunzio delivered his famous speech sounding the tocsin of war, the internal situation precipitated on account of an attempted Giolittian parliamentary *pronunciamento* against the obviously interventionist policy of the Prime Minister Salandra and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sonnino. A tumultuous crisis exploded

which was solved in favour of war by the King and the interventionist groups in contrast with normal Constitutional practice. In those radiant May days, the son of the Dovia blacksmith, now a protagonist of history, had imposed the supreme solution.

On the day of the declaration of war against Austria-Hungary, May 24, 1915, Mussolini was the first to warn the nation that all polemical discussions must now cease. "From to-day onwards there are only Italians. . . . And we, oh Mother Italy, offer you our life and our death."

Mussolini at once volunteered for service at the front. His application was rejected in view of the imminent mobilization of his class.¹ He was enrolled at the end of August, after a few months of rabid impatience because he felt acutely the moral duty of taking part in the national sacrifice which he had advocated. He became a private in the Bersaglieri once more, joining the 11th Regiment. On leaving his editorial chair his word of command to the few remaining members of the staff of the *Popolo d'Italia* was: "We must safeguard the rear. Be ever watchful! Strike damnably hard!" To those who exhorted him not to expose himself to too serious risks on account of his children, he replied sharply: "What does it matter? It is just because I have children that I can die. This is the thought which gives me the greatest peace of mind; I shall be continued. . . . As far as concerns myself I have no personal anxieties. I am ready to accept all the slings and arrows of fortune."

On his way to the front lines he passed through Tolmezzo and the district where he had been a

¹ Men liable for military service are divided up into annual contingents called classes, distinguished according to the year of birth.

school teacher ; a woman whom he had known in those distant years offered to give him shelter during a halt in his weary march, but he refused, saying : " I am a soldier like all the others," and he laid down to rest among his comrades on the steps of the church, wrapped up in his grey-green mantle.

He received his baptism of fire on September 17, on Hill 1270, near the legendary Monte Nero. After that first bombardment a Bersagliere came up to him to say in the name of the others : " Signor Mussolini, as we have seen that you have much spirit and have led us on the march amid the shells, we should like to be commanded by you." But the future Marshal of the Empire had no rank in the military hierarchy, and in his *War Diary* his only comment on this request was ' Sancta simplicitas ! ' Very soon the news of the presence of the interventionist leader in the firing line was spread about. Comrades and officers wished to meet him and addressed him in the familiar second person singular. Illiterate infantrymen begged him to write to their families for them and Mussolini always scrupulously fulfilled his duties without trying to avoid the risky patrol duties or the very trying *corvée* services. Only one refusal did he offer to his colonel when the latter summoned him to the regimental H.Q. to act as a clerk, and he was proud of it as a soldier to a soldier. He replied : " I prefer to remain with my comrades in the trenches." His wish was granted. On October 17 an Austrian 280 mm. shell exploded three metres away from him, and he was saved by one of those miraculous pieces of luck which were destined to be repeated many times in his life. He was then promoted corporal for military merits, i.e. ' for his exemplary activity, his gallantry worthy of

the Bersagliere tradition, and his serenity of spirit. Ever the first in every enterprise implying hard work or bravery. Careless of hardships, zealous and scrupulous in the execution of his duties.'

Subsequently he was promoted corporal-major, and then sergeant. Six years later he became leader of an army of three hundred thousand Blackshirts, and then Minister of War, Commander-in-Chief of the Militia, first Marshal of the Empire. Yet in November 1915 his application to attend an officers' training school was rejected because Mussolini the notorious revolutionist still aroused suspicion, even though he had been a promoter of Italy's intervention and had proved himself an excellent soldier. He returned, without any sign of bitterness, to his old comrades of the 11th Bersaglieri.

Far away in Milan, however, the neutralists would not resign themselves to their discomfiture, and reappeared under the guise of defeatists and shirkers. A most propitious thing happened : in order to give vent to his hatred against the editor of the *Popolo d'Italia* who was doing his duty in the face of death, a Socialist mayor from the Veneto was not ashamed of inciting one of his partisans, also a Bersagliere at the front, to murder the leader of the interventionists to avenge the neutralists. But the Bersagliere, instead of following the infamous suggestion, hastened to show the letter to the designated victim. Mussolini exercised a fascination on men's minds, and lent them inspiring encouragement, especially during the daily risks. Just about this time Filippo Corridoni, on the eve of his death, while gallantly attacking the Trincea delle Frasche,¹ wrote to his comrade in the interventionist campaign of the previous May : 'Dearest Benito, while we are awaiting our

¹ One of the most deadly positions on the whole of the Isonzo front.

marching orders, our best thoughts are about you, our spiritual *Duce* and our beloved comrade.'

This was the second time that he was called by the name destined to be declared from the house-tops by millions of men throughout the world.

VIII

IN THE WAR

IN his War memories the painter and author Ardengo Soffici writes : ' I saw Mussolini in the places where men were being killed for their country. It was in a ramshackle shanty, on a rainy and windy night, when the firing was heavy, beyond Saga at the foot of the Rombon massif in the Plezzo basin. His manly figure stood out in the light of the camp-fire and I saw his vivid glittering eyes for the first time in the ruddy glare of the flames crackling amid the resinous logs. His strong metallic voice I heard through the hissing of the rain, the howling of the wind, the angry grumbling of firing. . . . There was a moment of silence, and then one of the men exclaimed : " What a filthy war ! " From the group only one voice spoke out imperiously. The words issued forth from his lips with the same rhythm of a machine-gun which spits out fanwise ; his short sharp gesture cut through the smoky atmosphere. . . . And before our eyes the visions which he created with his fascinating words took shape. The country, duty, sacrifice, the home, the battlefield, the race under the sun, death. . . . Before leaving the shanty I asked a man who had remained behind if he knew that corporal, and he replied : " It is Mussolini." I resumed the ascent, and my knapsack, heavier than our weariness, seemed to have grown lighter, the climb less steep. For it was Faith which preceded us.'

In 1916 Mussolini's battalion had been ordered to the Carnia front, on a position over a thousand metres above sea-level. The Bersaglieri fought up there side by side with the Alpini, against the enemy, the cold, and the snow. In the intervals between war-like actions and various other duties, Mussolini continued to write his diary destined for the readers of the *Popolo d'Italia*. He also read Mazzini, and annotated such passages as the following : ' Great deeds are not accomplished by means of diplomatic protocols, but by guessing the meaning of one's own century. . . . The secret of power lies in the will.'

Relegated to the mountains, where the temperature was often 20 degrees below zero (centigrade), he did not completely lose touch with the life of the country. His acute sensibility made him perceive that the conduct of war left a good deal to be desired, owing to the errors of the High Command and the weakness of the Government in the face of the insidious defeatist propaganda. In November he sent an article to the *Popolo d'Italia* to warn Signor Orlando, then Minister of the Interior (afterwards Prime Minister). ' Sig. Orlando,' he wrote, ' there is a war on, a war which is destroying by the hundreds and by the thousands the lives of our young brethren, a war into which Italy has cast all her resources. We must win, because the stake is the life of the Nation, and the freedom of the peoples. We must win at all costs, and therefore the fullest discipline of the whole Nation is necessary, and therefore it is equally criminal to break down moral resistance and to allow this attempt to be made. . . . There is no mercy for the soldier who runs away in the face of the enemy ; there should be no mercy for him who tries to stab the armed Nation in the back.

. . . By the side of the Capitol, Signor Orlando, there is the Tarpeian Rock.'

Nevertheless the poison spread, undermining the spirit of the fighting men and the resistance of the country.

Transferred from the Carnia to the terrible *doline*¹ of the Carso in the early months of 1917, Mussolini inveighed against that 'government of national impotence' at a moment when a foul and infamous phrase was about pronounced in the Chamber of Deputies by the Socialists in order to shake the resistance of the troops : ' Next winter not another man in the trenches.'²

Corridoni had been killed in action ; Cesare Battisti and Nazario Sauro had been hanged as traitors by the Austrians into whose hands they had fallen because, although natives of the then Austrian Trentino, they had been captured fighting for Italy. In the early afternoon of February 23, 1917, a group of Bersaglieri was practising with a trench mortar on Hill 144 near Doberdò. Mussolini warned the lieutenant in command that it was time to stop. " Even the second case of ammunition is empty, and the iron is red-hot. There is going to be trouble." But the officer insisted on a last shot being fired, and there was trouble indeed. The bomb exploded in the bomb-thrower, five soldiers were killed, and Mussolini, who was manœuvring the weapon, was struck by the explosion and the fragments of the bomb and hurled several yards away. The survivors carried him off unconscious and bleeding profusely to the church at Doberdò for his first dressing. He was subsequently removed to the

¹ Rocky basins where the destructiveness of every shell which exploded was multiplied by fragments of rock.

² These were the words of Claudis Treves, and were intended to break the national spirit.

field hospital at Ronchi, where he impressed even the surgeons : the glamour of his eyes and his black beard were in such sharp contrast with his pallid and sunken face. He glanced steadily at the people moving around him, silent and hard in his effort to bear up stoically against the intolerable pain. He had 40 degrees of fever, and it was necessary to scrape his shin-bone and extract the fragments from the forty-two wounds with which he was riddled. He stared fixedly at the scalpel and clenched his powerful jaws so as not to shriek out. Into some of his wounds the surgeon was able to insert his whole fist. Infection, burning, suppuration, torture, and delirium, he suffered everything without narcotics. While throughout the hospital everyone heard how seriously wounded he was—a tragic reply to the rumour disseminated by the neutralists that he was a shirker—it was reported in Milan that he was dead, until Sandro Giuliani, a member of the staff of the *Popolo d'Italia* now serving with the army, came to see him and heard him make this statement : “ I am proud of having reddened the road to Trieste with my blood, in the execution of the most dangerous duty.”

On the morning of March 7 the soldier-King of Italy came to visit the hospital. The medical officer, Captain Piccagnoni, pointed out to His Majesty the bed on which Mussolini was lying. It was at that moment that the two makers of the future Italian Empire first met. “ How are you getting on, Mussolini ? ” the King asked. “ Not too well, Your Majesty,” the wounded man replied.

The King : “ The other day on Mount Deboli General M. spoke to me very well of you.”

Mussolini : “ I have always tried to do my duty

with discipline like any other soldier ; the General has been very kind to me."

The King : " Bravo, Mussolini. Try to bear up with resignation against immobility and pain."

Mussolini : " I thank Your Majesty."

Eleven days later the Austrian artillery shelled the field hospital in spite of the Red Cross emblem over it ; it has been asserted that the presence of the fiery interventionist and dangerous political man lying in it was known to the enemy. The shells struck the building, creating a panic among the wounded. ' This,' Mussolini wrote, ' was the most terrible scene I had ever experienced, an indescribable hell indeed ! ' He was not in a fit state to be moved elsewhere as the others were ; tied to his bed, he had to lie immovable waiting for the shots which might have killed him. ' All my fellow-patients have gone,' he noted down in his diary, ' the surgeons, the padre, and the nurses alone have remained in the hospital. I was the only wounded man left. Deep silence in the twilight.'

On April 2 he could be removed to Milan, where he underwent a long period of convalescence ; but as soon as he could drag himself about on crutches he went back to work. His new activity was dominated by a definite sensation that Italy was threatened with a grave danger. He reacted against it, aroused the public, gave timely warning, but it was all in vain : the Government was deaf and incompetent. While the Bersagliere Mussolini had been fighting in the front lines many serious evils had been spreading within the country owing to the criminal complicity of the neutralist parliamentary groups, the seditious elements, and those who speculated morally and even materially on the sacrifices of the fighting men.

During the summer of 1917 an Italian offensive beyond the Isonzo secured an important success on the Bainsizza plateau. Mussolini immediately urged those in responsible positions to take advantage of the propitious phase: 'The military records register a complete break-through on the front line, a manœuvre which has given the War a fundamentally dynamic character.' 'Gentlemen of the Government,' he wrote, 'this is the moment. For the time being put aside your ordinary routine business. Forget that you are Ministers. Forget Montecitorio¹ and its miserable triflings.' But he realized that he was talking to those who would not listen. "What I am saying is useless. Our rulers do not lead, they allow themselves to be led. They are not missionaries, they are officials. They have wasted the vast spiritual patrimony of May 1915; they will waste that of August 1917." This indeed was the case, and the Russian delegates, propagandists of Bolshevism and rebellion, were allowed to tour Italy in full freedom, to poison the people's minds and promote risings such as those which broke out in Turin that summer.

Then came Caporetto; a partial defeat, complicated by certain military errors, the weariness of the soldiers and the demoralization of the country, resulting in the breakdown of a whole sector of the front line, with the flood-tide of civilian refugees and disbanded soldiers on the lines of communication. "Face the enemy!" shouted Mussolini, the inspirer. 'This is no time for disputing!' said the King, in a proclamation to the country. 'Citizens and soldiers, be a single army!' The revolutionary agitator warned the nation that two different forms of discipline were now no longer conceivable, one

¹ The Parliament House.

for the soldiers and one for the civilians, nor was it permissible to accuse and libel the gallant Italian soldier stabbed in the back as he had been by internal defeatism far more than by the enemy facing him.

After the enemy had been held up on the Piave and on Monte Grappa, Mussolini, still a convalescent, intensified his journalistic activity, and dragged himself about to speak in the public squares and theatres, arousing everywhere a frenzied determination to avenge Caporetto. To all who visited him in his editorial cubby-hole, the wounded man predicted a great decisive battle in the Venetian plain, a battle 'which will drive the enemy back not to his positions of departure, but into the very heart of his country.' He greeted the opening of the year 1918 with these words :

'There are those who feel an icy chill before the unknown something, mysteriously guarded within the womb of the future ; there are also those who go towards the unknown in a youthful spirit of adventure.'

On February 24 he spoke in Rome, at the Augusteo : "I demand fierce men. I demand one fierce man endowed with the energy to sweep away, the inflexibility to punish, to strike without hesitating, and the higher up the guilty may be all the better."

But the man whom he invoked was himself alone, he who was then still so far from power. He concluded : "The fatherland must not be repudiated ; it must be conquered. . . . No, Italy cannot die, for she is immortal."

Disaster had intensified his faith and aroused his energy as the difficulties of life had always done. He gave himself up to the joy of his love of country.

"The joy of having found Italy once more—the mother whom we had never repudiated but only somewhat forgotten to follow with the fantastic ingenuousness of youth, the rosy phantoms of proletarian cosmopolitanism—was so vivid and deep that the contemptible trifles of men and things cannot disturb it."

On the anniversary of Italian intervention he spoke at Bologna before an audience of war-disabled veterans, asserting the rights of the men who had served in the army: "We the survivors, we who have returned, we claim the right to govern Italy, not to make her disintegrate in dissolution and disorder, but to lead her ever higher and ever further ahead, to render her, in thought and action, worthy of taking her place among the great nations which will be the leaders of the world civilization of tomorrow." In his eyes victory was already achieved. Now was the moment to think about Act II: the revolution.

IX

POST-WAR MADNESS

MUSSOLINI'S strategic instinct proved right ; in October, one year after the Caporetto retreat, with the contribution of the very young recruits who had come to fight side by side with the veterans of the Isonzo, Austria's last effort in June on the Montello and on the Piave was driven back, and the redemption of Trento and Trieste was hastened. Finally the thrilling victory *communiqué* was issued, followed by the Italo-Austrian armistice, the prelude to the end of the war on all fronts.

In those days of frenzied enthusiasm Mussolini extolled the event which was one such as Italy had not known for centuries. 'The great hour has come ! The hour of divine joyousness, when the tumult of emotions suspends the beating of the heart and gives us a lump in the throat. The long drawn-out passion crowned at last with triumph draws tears of joy even from those who have seen much and wept much.'

But there was still much to be done, much again to weep over. For the rulers of Italy were not up to their task. They failed to exploit the Italian victory in the international conferences for peace and were beaten at Versailles, almost as though they represented a vanquished nation instead of the first of the Allied nations to have achieved victory. Wilson's

bogus idealism, Lloyd George's cunning, Clemenceau's uncompromising intolerance formed a *bloc* against Orlando and Sonnino, and aroused among the Italians who were expecting the rewards of their great sacrifices, a sense of deep delusion. At home the State ignored the problems of demobilization and social reconstruction, the parliamentary world became once more predominant with its petty intrigues, the neutralists were determined to avenge their own defeat, the Socialists saw in the collapse of the country a platform for their own future triumph. Those who had fought, risking their lives in the trenches for nearly four years, had to return singly to their own homes, without moral or material reward, and resume their civilian existence, and amid endless humiliation and suffering to find a job. The economic depression intensified the general upheaval. No promises were kept. The result of the War which had been won appeared wholly negative in a heavy and clouded atmosphere while in Paris the Allies were celebrating the victory and the loot with a great parade.

Nevertheless, Mussolini with his unswerving faith saw further. While the War was still going on he had written to a friend : ' A mistaken calculation deceives the neutralists, who believe that those who have really fought the War, i.e. two or three million Italians, will spit on the War they have won as soon as peace returns. We shall see the societies of veterans of the national wars revive with a truly Garibaldian enthusiasm. The Italy of to-morrow will definitely be governed by the men who gave all for the War ! '

He at once resumed his campaign with his paper, no longer ' a daily Socialist organ,' ' but the organ of the ex-service men and of the producers.' On

December 20, 1918, he commemorated Oberdan at Trieste and then at Fiume where he spoke again, concluding that the disputed city should at all costs become Italian. In January 1919 he asked Gabriele D'Annunzio for an article for the *Popolo d'Italia*, and one evening he opposed Bissolati who wanted to deliver a speech at the Scala theatre in which he renounced Italy's claims. In the same way he had been opposed to Bissolati's doctrinaire Reformism in the now remote Reggio Emilia congress.

The more the tide of anarchy rose, the more vigorously did Mussolini react against it, stamping on the gang of opponents, the Wilsonians, the Nitti Government, with a temerity which startled the timorous *bien pensants*, and even jeopardized his own life day by day. Only a few faithful supporters remained with him in his *Popolo d'Italia* cubby-hole : *arditi*,¹ Futurists and ex-service men who entrenched themselves in those poor offices, mounting guard by turns, with bombs and weapons either ostensibly exposed or concealed in every corner. Between an article and a piece of news the members of the staff practised shooting at a target and eked out a precarious existence by distributing among themselves the few *lire* which the managers of this common poverty, Arnaldo Mussolini and Manlio Morgagni,² could dispose of. While strikes were spreading all over the country by the hundred, Mussolini said : " For the last three years we have been proclaiming the necessity of conferring on the War a social meaning in the interior of the country, not only to reward the masses who have defended the Fatherland, but also to associate them for the future with the nation

¹ The men who had belonged to the assault units.

² Journalist, now President of the Stefani Agency.

and its prosperity." To the metal workers of Dalmine who alone had entrusted their syndical demands to him instead of to the Socialists, he expressed certain views which were a forecast of the future Fascist syndicalism: "You are not poor, humble outcasts, according to the old rhetoric of literary Socialism; you are the producers, and it is in this role that you claim the right of negotiating with your employers on an equal footing."

While Nitti's Government amnestied the deserters, the Communists cursed the Tricolor, struck the officers and outraged the memory of the fallen, whereas he, Benito Mussolini, calling aloud above the clamour of the traitors, exclaimed: "Do not fear, ye glorious dead. Their game is only just begun. It will not be carried out. We shall defend you. We shall defend the dead. All the dead, even if it means digging trenches in the *piazze* and streets of our cities."

The *Popolo d'Italia* was the refuge of all those who rebelled against the triumphant Beast, the stronghold of the resolute, of those who had a will of their own, who harboured a new faith in their hearts. It was the recruiting centre for the volunteers in the civil war which was now casting its shadow over all Italy. Mussolini lived in the office without regular hours of work, received everyone in his narrow room filled with books, newspapers, old weapons and hand grenades. He worked ceaselessly and distributed his last lire to unemployed ex-service men, debated or shut himself up to meditate amid the shindy of the staff, the head of which was then Michele Bianchi. On his door he had posted the following notice: 'He who comes in does me honour. He who does not come in gives me pleasure.' Inside the office there was another

notice : ' Members of the staff are requested not to leave before they have come in.' Everything was in a state of perpetual motion, while outside, in the streets and *piazze* of Milan, the Socialist mob was threatening tumultuously, ever trying to attack this last stronghold of patriotic resistance. But they never dared. On one of the most dangerous days Orlando Danese was in the *Popolo d'Italia* offices, while through the windows came the cry : " Death to Mussolini! Long live Russia! " ' It is said,' wrote Danese later, ' that Mussolini, a few minutes before fighting a duel had a perfectly regular pulse ; I do not remember having felt it, but from his face, from his fierce smile—I could not define it otherwise—from his eyes, from his whole demeanour, I can conclude that at that moment his pulse was absolutely unaffected. He was sitting at his desk, in an extremely modest room, bare of furnishings, whose chief adornments were a large wall map of Italy with a little tricolor flag pinned on to Fiume. On the table was a large glass of milk which Mussolini every now and then stirred up with a spoon, and a N.C.O.'s monumental pistol, which contrasted oddly and most interestingly with the glass of milk. The shouts became menacing and blended with the trumpet-blasts of the police and the sharp snap of rifles being loaded. Mussolini, while waving the glass of milk about and occasionally sipping it, said these words to me : " They shout and scream, they make a hideous row, but once you do away with the flowing ties and the flags, they are a parcel of fools. And don't you believe that they will come in here, because, mind you, for them I am a dead man, they have already buried me ; but they know that if they do come I shall account for at least two of them. And in Milan, if you don't know it, among the

registered members of the P.U.S. (Partito ufficiale socialista) there are not two, I say two, heroes ready to face danger. Therefore . . . I drink my milk."

On that very day, in spite of everything, while commemorating the Garibaldians who had fallen in the Argonne, he declared: "I have unlimited confidence in the Italian people, in the virtues of the race, in its future deeds. . . . We are the fighters of the gloomy noon, but we are certain that the luminous dawn will return."

To hasten on the national awakening, when it seemed absurd to hope for it, Mussolini decided to gather together his few isolated forces in a single group. On March 23, 1919, he founded the 'Fascio di Combattimento'; not a party but a band of pioneers, closely bound to him by the common determination to react against disintegration by action rather than through the few ideal principles of their programme as set forth at that first gathering. The task of the Fasci di Combattimento in the revolution was the same as the 'Fasci di azione rivoluzionaria' had had with regard to the War. With these new Fasci Mussolini was continuing his own action.

The first followers were a few bold men; the situation, dominated as it was by the Red terror, certainly did not favour proselytism, nor did the Liberal and Conservative papers favour it—indeed they professed almost to ignore the movement, sensing that it would not defend capitalist and *bourgeois* interests, even if it were attacking Communism.

The first battle with casualties broke out on April 15 when a threatening mass of 100,000 Reds gathered in the Arena, and then, aroused by the speeches of the leaders, marched towards the Piazza

del Duomo. In the Via Mercanti the sinister seditious torrent was faced by a handful of *arditi*, officers, students of the Polytechnic Institute, Fascists and Futurists, led by Ferruccio Vecchi, Marinetti, and Chiesa.

David put Goliath to flight amid the explosions of hand grenades, pistol shots, and general confusion. At sunset the centre of Milan was liberated from the incubus, and the offices of the *Avanti!* were in flames. This first battle, prepared and decided upon at a meeting the night before in the offices of the *Popolo d'Italia*, had been won. But the civil war had barely begun. Those who had been hit squealed about reaction, but Mussolini did not try to avoid responsibility. "I am not afraid of words," he said. "I have a compass which guides me. Everything capable of making the Italian people great will be supported by me, and on the other hand everything which tends to degrade, brutalize, and impoverish the Italian people will find me hostile."

X

THE PARTY ARISES

WHILE the struggle was becoming more violent and every day his life was in danger, Mussolini went about the city without fear. He would leave the offices late at night, after the paper had been made up, and wend his way towards his distant home, insisting that his friends should let him go alone, as he did not wish them to run risks for his sake. Nor did he allow himself to be monopolized by the internal conflict ; in fact, he dealt with all the political problems of the moment, including international ones. On May 22 he was again at Fiume and spoke in the Teatro Verdi against Wilson and Versailles. He gazed yet further ahead ; with his prophetic intuition he illustrated Italy's Mediterranean requirements, insisted on the essential importance of being strong at sea ; he talked of Africa. He aroused his audience to such a point that immediately afterwards Host Venturi¹ was able to summon the youth of Fiume to the parade ground and form that battalion of volunteers which was to play a leading part in all subsequent events in the town.

Even if in Italy wild confusion, convulsions, strikes, riots, and Bolshevik madness continued to an extreme degree of abjectness, and a mortal anguish made many doubtful of the future, Mussolini kept

¹ A native of Fiume and one of the leading advocates of the annexation of the town to Italy. Afterwards Under-Secretary for Communications.

his head from the stronghold of his paper throughout the summer, until D'Annunzio marched from Ronchi to Fiume to save the town which Nitti's Government was about to hand over to the greed of the Allies. From that day Mussolini lent his support to D'Annunzio's enterprise and wrote powerfully effective articles against the contemptible head of the Rome Government who had dared to call D'Annunzio's legionaries deserters. The censorship was unable to silence the voice of the journalist, nor could it prevent the penniless *Popolo d'Italia* from appealing to the reviving national spirit and raising by subscription over three million lire to finance the Fiume expedition. The Government could not even prevent Mussolini from visiting Fiume for the third time on October 6, 1919, by aeroplane, although flights were forbidden. After a talk with D'Annunzio his return was handicapped in the air at Istria by a violent *bora*, and Mussolini had to land at the Aiello aerodrome, where he jumped off the machine only just in time to enable the pilot to take off once more to the surprise of the officers and soldiers who hastened to the scene. A *carabiniere* continued to shout to the pilot: "Stop, stop!"

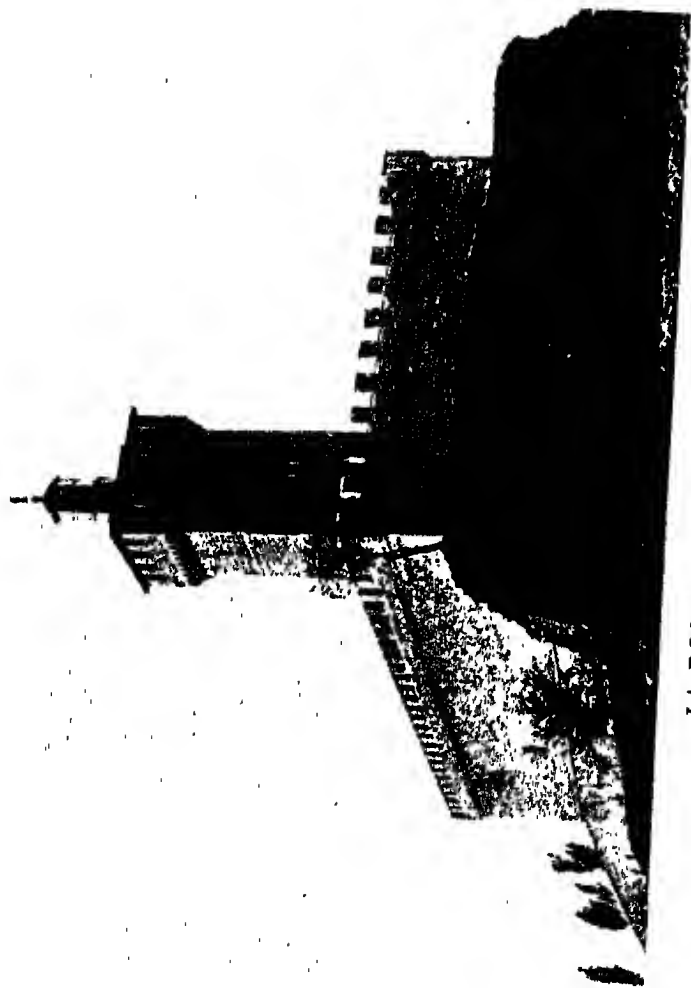
Mussolini was arrested and conducted to Udine, but General (now Field-Marshal) Badoglio¹ set him free. He then rushed off to Florence, where his comrades were waiting for him for the first Congress of the Fasci di Combattimento. He told them of how he had got away with it and took the chair at the meeting, where he extolled the action of D'Annunzio. That same day he was found eating alone in a restaurant by a party of Red gangsters who, strong in their numerical superiority, assumed

¹ Assistant Chief of the General Staff during the War, Commander-in-Chief during the Abyssinian campaign.

a provocative attitude ; but they took to their heels at once when, drawing a heavy revolver from his pocket, Mussolini said coldly : " The first man who passes this way again I shall shoot."

The situation got worse and became ever more sinister and threatening until November when a general election was held, the Government having gone to the country over the Fiume enterprise. Mussolini insisted on taking part in the struggle with a handful of fearless men, although he had not the ghost of a chance of success. In fact, all the Fascist candidates were defeated, having barely secured four thousand votes in all. But they had succeeded in speaking in the *piazze* of Milan without their opponents having dared to disturb their meetings, which were held at night by the light of torches and looked like gatherings of conspirators.

Defeat at the polls was followed by tragic days. Everything seemed lost ; the ranks of the faithful were thrown into confusion, while the Communists, masters of the city, celebrated their triumph with symbolical funerals of the defeated. The *Avanti!* published a sarcastic announcement of Mussolini's political demise, in which it was stated that his corpse had been fished up out of the waters of the Naviglio. Finally the Government, in order to secure the favour of the hundreds of Socialists and members of the Partito popolare who had been elected to the Chamber of Deputies, with abject servility had the Founder of the Fasci di Combattimento arrested. That arrest seemed to mark the death agony of all that was sound in Italy. ' Realizing the anxieties of my comrades,' Mussolini afterwards wrote, ' and the doubts of a few individuals in my service, I deemed it necessary to set forth my hopes and my sense of certainty. Do not



LA ROCCA DELLE CAMINATE

Photo Luce

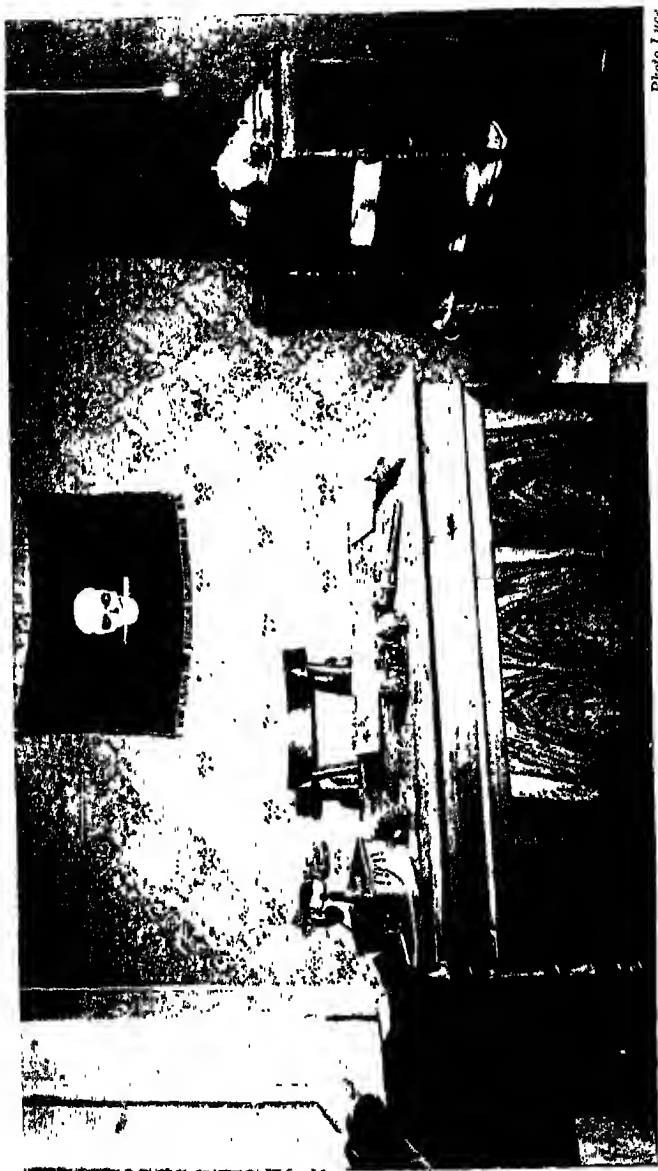


Photo Luce

THE 'CUBBY-HOLE' IN THE POPOLO D'ITALIA OFFICES

fear. Italy will recover from this disease. But without our watchful supervision it might prove fatal. We shall resist. Resist ! I am quite certain that within two years my turn will come ! ”

One day Mussolini happened to go to the post-office with his brother Arnaldo to cash a postal-order ; but the Socialist clerks had the audacity to pretend that they did not know him, and went on repeating to each other in provocative tone : “ Benito Mussolini ? Who knows him ? ” until an old postman intervened and shouted out energetically : “ Don’t be idiots ! Pay out that order at once. The name of Mussolini is not only known here, but it will become famous and will be judged by the whole world.”

Nevertheless from the bitter depths of so much moral meanness, Mussolini’s fighting spirit clearly foresaw the future victory. To the papers of all shades of opinion which professed to ignore the Fascist movement he said, with complete confidence : “ One day you will talk about Fascism ! ” At the beginning of 1920 he insisted, almost in a soliloquy : “ *Navigare necesse est*. Even against the current. Even against the herd. Even if shipwreck awaits the proud and lonely advocates of our heresy.”

On another occasion while waiting for a friend at a café table near the Galleria Umberto in Milan he was recognized and threatened by a crowd of maniacs. The owner of the café, anxious solely about the safety of his own premises, instead of standing up for his customer, begged him to leave. Mussolini, in fact, left the place, but stood outside in an attitude of self-defence ready for the counter-offensive, alone against the lot. Immediately the gang fell back intimidated and limited itself to

insulting him from a safe distance, while he went on his way undisturbed. He resisted against all threats, collected together the scattered groups of his followers, reacted against those who had been his friends but had now ratted and become his accusers. He even triumphed over them after an inquiry and an award by the Press Association, because his rigid personal honesty in every moment of his life rendered him immune, especially against moral attacks. He continued to incite his comrades and to reconstitute the scattered ranks. During the early Fascist gatherings, at the very moment when all hope appeared vain, 'Within a short time'—Mussolini wrote—'the psychology of the Italian people will be changed and the whole or at least the greater part of them will realize the material and moral value of victory. The whole nation will do honour to the men who have fought and will oppose those Governments which refuse to safeguard the future of the nation.' In September of the same year, 1920, he extolled in Trieste the dream of a new Roman empire—of that empire which he himself was to realize sixteen years later. The Italian Communists, who insulted him every day in their newspapers and speeches, about that time sent their delegates to visit the marvels of Lenin's Russia, without, however, if the truth be told, feeling too enthusiastic about it. But they were even more astonished when Lenin himself, speaking of Mussolini, said to them: "Why have you lost him? It is indeed a pity! He was a resolute man and would have led us to victory." As if this were not enough, Trotsky added: "They have lost their only good card; the one man who might have really led the revolution."

The year 1920 was the worst of our after-War period; to the sordid spectacle of the Socialist-

Communist orgy with its daily riots, strikes in the public services, murders, outrageous insults against the army and the officers, were added the disastrous activities of Nitti's Government which, in Rome, had a crowd of Dalmatians, women, and students, fired on during a demonstration. After this monstrous episode the Senate alone reacted with a vigorous protest promoted and signed by the two victors of the War, General (afterwards Field-Marshal) Diaz and Admiral Thaon di Revel. Giolitti's Government, which succeeded that of Nitti's, ordered the evacuation of Albania, allowed the factories to be seized by the workers and after the signing of the Rapallo Treaty with Yugoslavia had D'Annunzio bombarded in order to drive him out of Fiume.

A wave of disintegration spread all over the country. Death lay in ambush at the backs of the Fascists. Nitti had destroyed the military air-force ; a few bold airmen, during a propaganda flight in favour of civil aviation, crashed near Verona. After the Florence congress, Mussolini, while touring along the Via Æmilia with some friends, struck the barrier of a level crossing near Faenza ; he was thrown a considerable distance, but once more remained unhurt.

He returned to Milan to continue his struggle. It appeared indeed hopeless. But during the last months of the year his courageous example and that of the few followers who had still remained at his side began to bear fruit. The action squads of the *Fasci di Combattimento* reacted against the constant provocations of the Reds, punished the promoters of strikes with resolute violence and adopted a military organization. The wheels of Italian history thus began to revolve once more,

slowly at first, but later with a more accelerated rhythm towards a complete reversal of the situation.

Mussolini felt that before dealing with the Italian interests which had been compromised by the Government in the international field, it was necessary to restore order and discipline in the interior of the country and seize power by means of organized forces. He therefore refused to attempt an insurrection which he had planned and discussed with D'Annunzio during the Fiume enterprise and was to have been concluded with a march on Rome. The attempt was bound to fail, and would indeed have compromised the future. Later in a speech at Trieste he explained his conduct, saying that after the signing of the Rapallo Treaty that instrument "could have been cancelled by one of two means—a foreign war or an internal revolution. Both were absurd. You do not make a people rise in the streets against a peace treaty, after five years of bloodshed and suffering. No one is capable of accomplishing such a prodigy!" He never lost his sense of realities. "Some have blamed me for not having accomplished that light, easy, graceful thing called a revolution. A revolution must, first and foremost, have a soul of its own, a clearly defined soul; only with clear ideas can peoples be conquered. It must have a definite object, a precise programme which will prevent its breaking down on the morrow of victory through internal dissension. A revolution is not a jack-in-the-box which will jump up at pleasure. Revolutions are carried out with the army, not against the army; with arms, not without arms; with movements of organized units, not with amorphous masses, called out to demonstrate in the streets,

They succeed when they are surrounded by a halo of sympathy on the part of the majority of the nation ; otherwise they freeze and fail."

A protracted agrarian strike during the summer of 1920 had resulted in the loss of the crops throughout the Po plain. The tyrannical truculence of the seditious unions provoked the Fascist reaction which broke out with violence in the winter. To free the country-side and the towns from Bolshevik oppression the Fascist squads attacked the Labour exchanges, the town halls and the Socialist headquarters, and they were always successful because their members were never afraid of facing risks or even of being killed. Many in fact were killed during these punitive expeditions, or when ambushed by their adversaries. Between the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921 Bologna, Ferrara, and Modena were freed from Red rule, but not without the loss of many gallant Fascist lives.

From his Milanese 'cubby-hole' Benito Mussolini commanded and guided the Fascists by means of his daily articles. On the second anniversary of the foundation of the movement he wrote these words which are a revelation of his complete confidence in success :

'Fascism is a great mobilization of material and moral forces. What does it aim at? I state it without false modesty : to govern the nation. With what programme? With the programme necessary to ensure the moral and material progress of the Italian people.'

He extolled the gallant youths gathered around the black pennons¹ and drafted the main principles

¹ The various Fascist units had pennons, or small flags, adorned with their respective emblems.

for the preparation of the government of to-morrow, at a time when the majority even of his most enthusiastic followers, while ready to sacrifice their lives, were still unable to believe in a complete triumph of the movement. He alone harboured absolute certitude in his heart. 'On the anniversary of the foundation,' he wrote, 'let us bow our heads before the dead and stand up to salute the living gathered in thousands around our standards. They are the finest youth of Italy, the soundest, the most gallant. In the meanwhile, behind this mighty scaffolding, the whole Fascist workshop is at work. This one carries stones, that one lays them out, the other leads and draws up the plans. Fascists, go ahead ! Soon Fascism and Italy will be synonymous !'

The forces of recovery had been launched ; whatever may have been the political origins of the men gathered together in the various Fascist headquarters to organize themselves and take action, rather than to discuss programmes, they had all elected Mussolini as their only chief. After all these years of bitter struggle, after the gloomy years of isolation, Mussolini now stood forth as the maker of this new history. He controlled the Fascists by the prestige of his personality and of his writings, in meetings and through the *Popolo d'Italia*. The outlines of his vigorous features began to be stencilled on the walls of houses in town and country. The very murderous frenzy of the parties hostile to him made his figure stand out all the more. Every day *squadristi*¹ fell for their faith and expired invoking his name which was already being sung in the battle hymns inherited from the War. Amid all this violent tumult, which culminated in the

¹ The action squads were composed of *squadristi* as distinguished from the supporters of the movement who did not take part in the punitive expeditions, mostly older men.

murder of Giovanni Berta in Florence,¹ in the massacre of sailors committed by the Red gangsters at Empoli, in the explosion of an Anarchist infernal machine in the Diana theatre in Milan, Mussolini was spiritually ever present, ever the dominant spirit ; but during the intervals he would shut himself to meditate, to calculate with crystal-clear lucidity the practical possibilities and the instructions to be issued. He also wished to practise flying, and in a trial flight his 'plane, owing to stoppage of the motor, crashed from a height of forty metres and was smashed to pieces, without much injury to Mussolini himself or to his instructor Redaelli. He had, however, to keep quiet for a certain time. Soon afterwards an Anarchist from Piombino visited him in his own house, stopped him in the street, and finally came to him at the office of his paper to confess that he had been entrusted with the task of murdering him ; he laid down upon the table the heavy revolver which he had not had the courage to use.

On April 3, 1921, Mussolini returned to work and reached Bologna somewhat lean after his convalescence, with the hard lines of an ascetic ; in his eyes glittered an almost pained yet firmly dominating expression. They remind us of the eyes in the best-known photograph of Alfredo Oriani, and they reveal the inner drama of the man who has undertaken a mission and looks around him to seek out and weigh the other men with whom he is to carry out his task. But when he stepped on to the stage of the Municipal Theatre to deliver his long-expected address before the surging crowd of *squadristi*, the

¹ Giovanni Berta was a young boy who was attacked by Communists in Florence while crossing a bridge over the Arno. He was knocked off his bicycle and thrown over the parapet ; when he tried to cling on to the parapet a Communist hacked at his hands and made him fall into the river and drown.

physical and spiritual figure of the Duce was already there.

He warned his audience that Fascism "was not only born in my mind and heart. . . . It has arisen out of the deep eternal yearning of this race of ours, Aryan and Mediterranean, which at a certain moment felt itself menaced in the essential reasons of its existence by a tragic folly and by a mythical fable which is now breaking up in the very spot where it was born." He maintained that Fascism meets labour half-way, and launched the idea of celebrating the feat of Italian labour on April 21, the date of the founding of Rome by Romulus.¹

Again Georges Sorel, although now a sympathizer with Bolshevism, interpreted the personality of Mussolini: 'He is not less extraordinary than Lenin. He too is a political genius standing head and shoulders above all other political men living to-day. . . . I heard of him during the War. He is no Socialist in a *bourgeois* sauce; he has never believed in Parliamentary Socialism. He has an extraordinary capacity for understanding the Italian people and has invented something which is not in any book: the union of the national with the social spirit.'

That is why Fascism was never reactionary, in spite of the hopes of this kind which the *bourgeois* and capitalist groups placed in it, in spite of the charge of 'agrarian serfdom' which in the polemical period his enemies brought against him. Mussolini had always affirmed that 'there is no going back,' and he always conceived the war as the prelude to a national revolution. He said: "If the *bourgeoisie* does not know how to defend itself it need not

¹ The Socialists had made May 1 Labour Day, and it almost invariably proved the occasion for riots and violence.

expect to be defended by us. We defend the Nation. We want the material and moral success of the people."

The working people of the Po valley, after the orgy of the Socialist experiment, having realized the wholesome soundness of Mussolini's principles, were the first to follow him. In Bologna he had been welcomed as a liberator from Red tyranny amid delirious demonstrations and torchlight processions. On April 4, before a vast crowd of agricultural workers at Ferrara, he presented the mystical idea of revolution summed up in the idea of Rome, which had ever dominated his spirit since the distant years of his childhood in Romagna. "Rome is our point of departure and of reference, it is our symbol, or if you will our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, of an Italy tenacious and strong, disciplined, and imperial. Much of what was the immortal spirit of Rome arises once more in Fascism: Roman is the Lictors' emblem, Roman is our fighting organization, Roman is our pride, our courage."

He was already the Duce of the future Italy, drawing the faithful after him towards a new life. Millions of individuals soon fell into line in the service of the Fascist cause; bands of volunteers dashed about from province to province to strike down Communist resistance, they chose as their leaders the most enterprising comrades, they donned the now famous black shirt worn under old military uniforms,¹ they adopted the Roman salute, a bearing, a manner of life and speech, and ritual of a mystic character; they knelt around the biers of the fallen and welcomed into the new syndical organizations the working men who abandoned the notorious Red unions.

¹ It had been originally worn by the *arditi* in the War.

Mussolini returned once more to Fiume to reassert his solidarity with the comrades who had held firm throughout the terrific struggle which had lasted since the Armistice. Then he faced the political election of May 1921. As he had foreseen, two years after the defeat of 1919 he was returned for Parliament by a huge majority in two constituencies, together with a band of thirty-five other Fascists who for the first time entered the Chamber and commenced their activities by expelling a certain Misiano, a contemptible deserter in the War who boasted of having deserted in the face of the enemy and had on the strength of this exploit been elected by the Communists. A considerable number of other members, Nationalists and Liberals, supported him.

The leader of the Fascists retained the centre of his activities at the *Popolo d'Italia* offices, and only spoke in the Chamber of Deputies to deal with fundamental questions, especially those concerning international affairs. On Count Sforza, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, he delivered several smashing attacks until the Giolitti Cabinet, of which Sforza was a member, fell.

To dominate the development of the Fascist movement, which was growing every day in activity and strength, was Mussolini's most serious task at that time, especially when the Bonomi Cabinet deluded itself into believing that it could repress the internal conflict by means of police measures which in many cases proved beneficial only to the enemies of the State. At Sarzana and Modena many Fascists were killed in encounters with the police or were tortured and massacred by the Red gangsters. The crisis reached such a pitch of intensity that Mussolini was induced to attempt a

measure of appeasement to put an end to the daily shedding of blood. The Socialists agreed, but not the Communists, and this rendered Mussolini's public-spirited action fruitless. To carry it out he had had to impose his will on the Blackshirts. As far back as the days of the struggles with the Republicans in the Romagna he had warned his followers that violence is only necessary in extreme cases, and provided that it is the consequence of a spirit of sacrifice, and never as an end in itself. "We do not make of violence a school, a system, or worse still an æsthetic concept. Violence must be generous, chivalrous, a surgical operation. . . . No mean individual violence, sporadic, and often useless, but violence on a broad, grand scale, the inevitable violence of the decisive hour. In any case, in history every time that bitter conflicts of interests and ideas arise, it is force which in the last resort decides the issue."

As in some districts the Fascist squads showed signs of rejecting his instructions, Mussolini acted even against them with vigour. "I am," he said, "a leader who leads and not one who follows. I go ahead, even and indeed especially against the stream ; I never lose my head and I am ever watchful, above all when the changing wind fills the sails of my fortune."

But it was the Government itself and the coalition of opponents which forced Fascism into an attitude of renewed intransigence. The struggle was resumed. During this period Mussolini fought several duels in which he always got the better of his antagonists, and was busy preparing the Fascist congress which was to be held at the Augusteo in Rome the following November in an atmosphere of silent hostility. He proposed to consolidate the

movement by means of a unifying discipline, and in spite of a certain measure of fresh dissent he founded the Party. "We shall now see the end of the spectacle of Liberal Fascists, Nationalist Fascists, Democratic Fascists, and perhaps even Fascists who belong to the Popular Party. There will now be only Fascists." He also proposed to give the Party a less personal character and to free it from his own predominant influence. He exhorted his comrades : "Recover from me ! Construct a party with a collective executive, ignore me ; indeed if you wish, you may forget me." That of course proved impossible, either then or afterwards.

Mussolini was now the leader not only of the Fascists, but of the new Italy. Nevertheless he attended the international conference at Cannes as a mere journalist and there he interviewed Briand. In March 1922 he also went to Germany and met Stresemann, Wirth, and Kuno. Within a few days he had interviewed political men, civil servants, ex-servicemen, had visited the remoter districts and realized the latent German reaction to Versailles, and in his conclusions he predicted the vigorous psychological, economic, and military re-awakening of the German people which he was convinced could not be long delayed. But the ever more urgent internal vicissitudes summoned him back to Italy. The Fascists were now masters of the *piazze* of the cities and of the country-side. He cut short the fresh dissensions within the Party by resigning from the chairmanship of the Parliamentary Fascist group. The group at once voted by acclamation a resolution of solidarity, inviting him as leader of the Fascists to resume his chairmanship. Decisive events were inevitably maturing.

In a speech in Bologna in the spring of that year

Mussolini stated : " What we are now accomplishing is a revolution which will break the Bolshevik State while we are getting ready to settle up accounts with the Liberal State which still survives." Here was the new strategic objective on the horizon, because both the Bonomi Government and that of Facta which succeeded it continued to regard the Fascists and the Red extremists as outside the law, thereby outraging the national forces by putting them on the same footing with the anti-national ones. Indeed in many cases the police officials and the prefects of the provinces joined forces with the seditious elements to fight the Fascists, while the old *bourgeois* classes insinuated that after the exemplary punishment inflicted on the Communists Fascism should regard its task as accomplished and hand over to the old ruling classes and let them restore the old order of things ; it was a preposterous demand on the part of people who saw nothing and understood nothing beyond their own interests.

Mussolini had opened the year 1922 with the decisive affirmation that ' no obstacle will hold us up.' He then began to consider the imperative possibility of solving the situation by the seizure of power. He had founded a review which began to set forth and elaborate the theoretical programme of the Fascist ideal, giving it as its title the watchword of the movement *Gerarchia* (hierarchy), because in fact the problem now was to prepare the advent of the new hierarchies. In an article he wrote : ' There is no doubt that Fascism and the State are destined, perhaps in a relatively near future, to become identical terms. Fascism can open the door with the key of legality, but it may also be forced to burst open that door with the shoulder stroke of insurrection.'

XI

ZERO HOUR

ON the death of Pope Benedict XV Mussolini recognized the universal greatness of the Church and alluded to the revival of spiritual and religious values. Ever ready to parry the enemy's moves on all fronts and at all moments, he drove the Fascists to counter-attack when the Socialists proclaimed a strike of the First of May, and another, the so-called 'legalitarian' strike, in the following August. During one of the many Cabinet crises the coalition of anti-Fascist forces had launched this second strike which was intended as a protest, and indeed as a form of intimidation and blackmail. But the Fascist squads made it collapse immediately, taking the place of the strikers in the various public services and maintaining order which the absentee Government failed to maintain. Thus the new-born Party deprived both its adversaries of authority and gave proof of its own maturity to attain power. During those days Ancona, Milan, and Genoa witnessed the complete triumph of Fascism; the last remaining Socialist municipal administrations were driven out and Gabriele D'Annunzio spoke to the crowd from the town hall of Milan.¹ In September the Black-shirt legions reacted against the policy of feebleness and pusillanimity hitherto followed in the Alto

¹ For several years that great city had been misgoverned by a Red municipality which ruined its finances.

Adige in the face of the anti-Italian movements organized from abroad, and imposed obedience and respect for the Italian laws.

Now that the ground had been cleared it was necessary to provide a definite solution for the great national problem. On October 16 Mussolini summoned the chief political and military leaders of the Party to Milan to take the supreme decisions—Michele Bianchi, Italo Balbo, Cesare De Vecchi, Attilio Teruzzi,¹ Generals Emilio De Bono, Gustavo Fara, and Sante Ceccherini, while Ullisse Igliori² came later. We have the minutes of that meeting drafted by Italo Balbo who took down the statements and opinions of each member present. Here are his notes :

‘Mussolini states : that the Government and the anti-Fascist groups are trying to strangle our movement ; he speaks of the election which had been asked for but refused, just as electoral reform and an extra-Parliamentary Cabinet crisis had been refused. “Giolitti thought he could go as far as to grant us two seats in the Cabinet ; but we demand six or none at all. In that case we must bring the masses into action so as to create an extra-Parliamentary crisis and seize power. We must prevent Giolitti from coming into office again. As he gave orders that D’Annunzio be fired upon he would do the same for the Fascists. This is the moment. Public opinion is waiting and the seditious groups are forming syndical alliances. To-day no seditious leader will assume the responsibility of proclaiming a general strike.” He then proceeds to examine the

¹ Political man and soldier, served in colonial campaigns and the World War, was Governor of Cyrennia, and is now Under-Secretary for Italian Africa (this is the new name of the Ministry of the Colonies).

² Political man and soldier, lost an arm in the War, received a gold medal for valour.

Army and its position with regard to Parliament. He thinks that on Saturday at noon the Party directorate should cease to function ; a Quadrumvirate, composed of Balbo, De Bono, De Vecchi, and Bianchi, will come into operation. Then Piedmont will absorb Turin, Lombardy, Milan ; from Piacenza to Rimini ; Parma. In the meanwhile three armies are formed at Ancona, Orte, Civitavecchia, commanded by Fara, De Bono, Ceccherini.¹ Then the proclamation, of which a draft is submitted, is published, and action is taken in accordance with it.

' In the meanwhile the Naples meeting continues to be boosted. " I think we are all agreed, but if not I warn you that I shall attack all the same. It is useless to wait for our forces to be absolutely perfect, which they never will be."

' De Bono says one point is essential—the functioning of the hierarchies is lacking. De Vecchi says : " Our military organization is in process of transformation, and is therefore weak. The machine moves slowly." He again asks for another forty days to perfect it. As a matter of form, the disciplinary regulations must be carried out. Massed manœuvres should be formed. De Bono says he is the object of attacks by the Government, " they say that my name is used as a decoy. I am working up the Army. A little more time would be useful." Mussolini : " What if the political atmosphere should change ? " Fara does not believe in the slogan of immediate necessity. He supports De Vecchi's proposal for delay. He says he does not know the men or the leaders. Balbo maintains

¹ These generals were all on the retired list, for Mussolini was determined to keep the Army and the officers on the active list out of politics. Even to-day no officer may be a member of the Party.



Photo Luce

MUSSOLINI IN THE TRENCHES

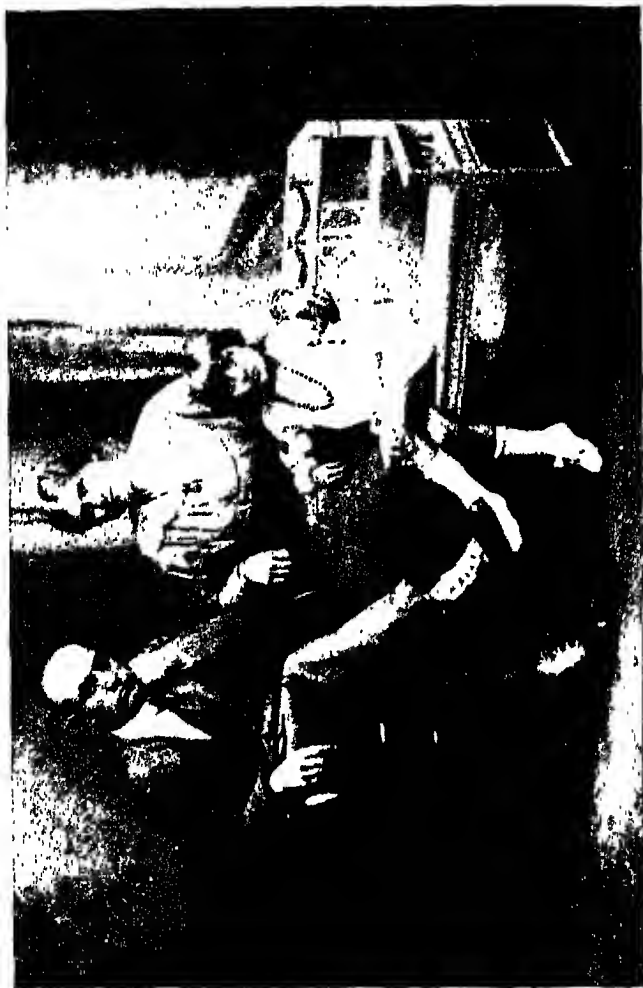


Photo Luce

MUSSOLINI WITH HIS WIFE AND HIS DAUGHTER EDDA IN 1917

that the column commanders must know the inspectors and the consuls.¹ He is anxious about the supply and transport services. De Bono: "The Naples convention is necessary; it will be useful for the future." He criticizes the manner in which the legions function.

'Mussolini: "The objects of this meeting have been secured. (1) There is unanimity of views on the urgent necessity for action; (2) ditto on the ways and means—the three columns; (3) ditto on the generals to command the columns; (4) ditto on the Quadrumvirate. We must discuss the date." A discussion on this question follows, everyone present takes part in it. Agreement on the date is arrived at. Mussolini insists that the command of the Militia should not be divided, but should at once examine the various problems. D'Annunzio is favourable.'

All other evidence on that meeting proves the sense of timeliness and the boldness of the Duce, who imposed his will for immediate action in the face of the reservations and the proper prudence of the other leaders, including Balbo and Bianchi who were nearest to his point of view. Nevertheless they all accepted Mussolini's conclusions, and set to work to prepare for action.

Any delay would indeed have compromised the success of the revolution because Facta's Government, under the pressure of the conversion of the feelings of the Italian masses, was proposing to offer a nominal satisfaction to the ex-servicemen, four years after the end of the War, with a solemn celebration of the victory, to be held in Rome in the presence of Gabriele D'Annunzio. Any compromise between the old Italy and the new must

¹ This is one of the ranks in the Fascist hierarchy.

be averted by seizing power before the anniversary of the Armistice.

Mussolini, having imposed his own plan of campaign, set to work to prepare the minds of the mass of his followers by a series of public speeches, while the suspicions of the decrepit Parliamentary world were lulled by sundry negotiations destined to lead to no result.

On September 20, 1922, on the eve of a speech which Facta delivered at Pinerolo to give expression once more to his vague and roseate confidence in the future, Mussolini spoke at Udine to an audience of Venetian Fascists, while a great Alpine eagle, after several broad circular flights, descended on to the tower of the castle. The Duce said: "If Mazzini, if Garibaldi attempted three times to reach Rome, and if Garibaldi placed before his Redshirts the tragic inexorable dilemma, 'Rome or death,' that means that among the best men of the Italian Risorgimento, Rome fulfilled an essential function of the first importance to be carried out in the new history of the Italian Nation. . . . We think of making of Rome the city of our spirit, a city well disciplined, disinfected of all the elements which corrupt it and disfigure it; we are thinking of making of Rome the pulsating heart, the agile spirit of that Imperial Italy of which we dream. . . . I am in favour of the strictest discipline. We must impose on ourselves the most rigid discipline, for otherwise we should have no right to impose it on the nation. And it is only through national discipline that Italy can secure a hearing in the councils of the nations."

As the established date approached, the Duce spoke again at Cremona in a conversation with his followers—or rather it was the soliloquy of a

protagonist before history, without a trace of rhetoric, for he was the enemy of wordy eloquence. He declared : " Only by blackguards and criminals can we be accused of being enemies of the working classes, we who are sons of the people, we who have known the rude toil of the muscles, we who have always lived among working people who are infinitely superior to the false prophets who claim to represent them. . . . Fascism has been in existence four years and has before it a task great enough to fill a century. What is that quivering sense which you feel throughout your body when you hear the measures of the *Canzone del Piave*?¹ The fact is, the Piave is not the end : it marks a beginning. It is from the Piave, from our victory, mutilated though it has been by pusillanimous diplomacy, yet glorious, that our pennons come forth. It is from the banks of the Piave that we have commenced that march which cannot cease until it has reached its supreme goal—Rome ! There are no obstacles, of men or circumstances, which can hold us up ! " He continued his speech at Milan, before the squads of the Sciesa² group, calling upon the redeeming spirits of the fallen to descend upon the army of Blackshirts which was getting ready for the fray. " In this general expectation which keeps all Italians in suspense, awaiting an event which is bound to come, I did not wish to lose the chance of defining certain points of view. . . . You feel this evening, in this little room that the spirit of our fallen comrades is in the air. . . . The citizens are asking themselves : which State will end by dictating its law to the

¹ The song composed during the War after Caporetto when the Italian army was holding desperately to the Piave line.

² Each squad bore the name of a Fascist who had been killed in fighting the Reds.

Italian people? We have no hesitation in answering : the Fascist State. . . . As you see, our game is now quite clear. On the other hand, when one is preparing to deliver an attack on a State, a little plot to be kept secret almost to the moment of the attack is unthinkable. . . . The clash appears inevitable."

Here is Mussolini's programme of the Fascist State: "To govern the Nation well, to guide it towards its splendid destiny, to conciliate the interests of the various classes without arousing the hatred of one class or the egoism of another, to drive the Italians as a single force towards world tasks, to make of the Mediterranean our lake, that is to say, allying ourselves with those who live in the Mediterranean and expelling those who in the Mediterranean are parasites. In carrying out this hard, patient task, Cyclopic in its lines, we shall indeed inaugurate a period of greatness in Italian history." He concluded: "Friends, I have confidence in you! You have confidence in me! In this mutual loyal pact is the guarantee, the certainty of our victory."

The delegates from the provinces were summoned to the Naples' convention for October 24, so as to secure for the Fascist movement the support of Southern Italy. Not a few even of the Fascist leaders believed that it was going to be one of the usual congresses; but the speech which the Duce delivered there was obviously a definite prelude to action.

"I am almost ashamed," he said, "to be speaking again. But in view of the extraordinarily serious situation in which we find ourselves, I consider it desirable to lay down with the utmost precision the terms of the problem, so that individual responsi-

bilities may be made perfectly clear. We Fascists do not intend to enter office by the back door ; we Fascists have no intention of selling our formidable birthright for a mess of wretched Ministerial pottage. . . . The problem, not bounded by its historic limits, takes shape and becomes a problem of force. . . . No, there cannot be any doubt, even the Italian Monarchy, on account of its origins and the evolution of its history, will not be opposed to those which are the tendencies of the new national force. . . . Let the Army know that we, a handful of bold men, have defended it when Cabinet Ministers advised officers to wear mufti in order to avoid brawls. . . . With those who plot against us, and above all plot against the Nation, there can be no peace save after victory."

From that moment the Romagnol man of the people, who had emigrated to seek out his path, the polemical writer, the fighter, the Party leader, had been transformed into the arbiter of Italy's destiny. He appeared in the Piazza del Plebiscito with a red and yellow sash—the colours of Rome—over his black shirt, before the arrayed legions who acclaimed him with frenzied enthusiasm and in absolute obedience shouting : "To Rome, to Rome !" He seized the moment and assumed a solemn undertaking : "I tell you with all the seriousness which the moment demands : it is now a question of days, perhaps of hours ; either the Government will be given to us or we shall seize it by descending on Rome ! In order that the action may be simultaneous and that it should in every part of Italy take the contemptible political ruling class by the throat, you should return at once to your respective headquarters. I tell you and

I assure you and I swear to you that the orders, if necessary, will come ! ”

After imparting very definite secret instructions to the designated leaders, he left for Milan. To the delegates, who thought that the work of the convention might still be proceeded with, Michele Bianchi said ironically : “ It is raining in Naples ; what are you doing here ? ” The Blackshirts returned to their homes, and the leaders proceeded to the posts assigned to them.

The plan of campaign comprised the seizure of the public offices in the cities, and then a march of armed columns converging from various points on Rome. Acting on the orders of the Duce, the Quadrumvirate composed of Balbo, Bianchi, De Bono, and De Vecchi set up its headquarters at Perugia and addressed to the Fascist masses a proclamation prepared by Mussolini at the beginning of October, which announced : “ The hour for the decisive battle has struck,” and ended : ‘ We appeal to God Almighty and to the spirits of our five hundred thousand dead¹ as witnesses that one impulse alone urges us on, a single will unites us, a single passion inflames us—to contribute to the safety and greatness of our country. Fascists of all Italy ! Keep your spirits and your strength tense in the Roman manner. We must win. We shall win.’

During the last hours preceding the operation Mussolini had to ward off the suspicions of the police who were watching him, and amid so many engagements of such grave responsibility he pretended to be busy only with his newspaper and even allowed himself some distractions, such as occasional auto-

¹ This was the number of Italian soldiers believed at that time to have fallen in the World War. Later statistics give a higher figure (650,000).

mobile trips in the environs of the city. He was serene and calm, so much so that not even all the members of the staff of the *Popolo d'Italia* realized what was afoot. On the evening of October 27 he appeared in a box at the Manzoni theatre to attend a performance of *The Swan* by Molnar, like any middle-class citizen desirous of ending his day agreeably. At a certain point of the play a member of the staff of the paper knocked at the door of the box and entered whispering: "Mr. Editor, a telephone call has come through. It has begun." The drama had begun. Mussolini got up hastily but unmoved, and left the box saying: "We are in for it. Good night."

Mussolini went to his room in the newly inaugurated offices of the *Popolo d'Italia*, while the police were surrounding the building with machine-guns. The premises were barricaded from within and members of the Fascist fighting squads came to garrison it. Here and there a few shots were fired. At a certain moment Mussolini himself had to go out into the street and parley with the commander of the *carabinieri* to avert a conflict. He seized a carbine and went through the danger zone alone, while his followers held their breath. Suddenly a *squadrista* in his excessive anxiety fired a shot which just grazed Mussolini's head. But the Duce remained unmoved and succeeded in imposing a truce, thereby saving the situation and averting a riot.

Just as D'Annunzio had warned him before leaving Ronchi for Fiume, so now Mussolini wrote two letters to the Soldier-Poet while the March on Rome was developing. 'We have had to mobilize our forces to cut short a wretched situation. We are now fully masters of a large part of Italy, and

in other parts we have occupied the essential nerve centres of the Nation. I do not ask you to range yourself on our side, although it would be of great advantage to us ; but we are sure that you will not set yourself against this admirable mass of youth who are fighting for your Italy and ours. Read the proclamation ! In a later moment you will surely have great words to say. . . . The Italy of to-morrow will have a government. We shall be discreet enough not to indulge in excesses over our victory.'

But Mussolini absolutely refused to accept the various compromise solutions which were submitted to him, decided as he was to assume the fullest responsibility for a definite settlement of the national crisis.

The King had hastened to Rome from his country seat at San Rossore. On October 27 the first phase of the Fascist strategic plan had been carried out in Northern and Central Italy, where the cities and the rural districts were dominated by the fighting squads. Here and there some blood was shed in occasional conflicts. But the progress of the legions converging on Rome was not arrested, even when Facta proclaimed martial law and wire entanglements were laid down at the gates of the Eternal City. The soldier-King, however, would not and could not unleash the Army against the fighters in black shirts, and refused to sign the martial law decree, and without his signature it was invalid. Facta was forced to resign in consequence, together with the whole Cabinet. Every attempt at a Parliamentary solution of the crisis had broken down before the uncompromising attitude of the man who was awaiting his hour at the *Popolo d'Italia* office. As he had taken full responsibility

for the Revolution, so now he claimed full responsibility for the government of the country. To a dilatory telephone call from Rome he replied : " I shall come to Rome when I shall have been officially sent for to form a Cabinet," and he then hung up the receiver. Around him all were in a fever heat ; armed youths came to take orders, his lieutenants reported on the various phases of the action in the different provinces. The atmosphere of those grey rainy days was charged with electricity as were men's spirits ; he alone remained perfectly unruffled in his steely resolution. He had ordered his supporters to control the hostile newspapers so that they should not accentuate the general tension.

At noon on October 29 he was informed from the Quirinal that the King had sent for him to form a government. He then merely provided that the *Popolo d'Italia* should publish the news in a special edition, but he demanded telegraphic confirmation that he really had been entrusted with the task, and only when he had received it did he leave for Rome. He left the editorship of the paper to his brother Arnaldo, his favourite follower and the first instrument of the Revolution. To a high railway official who had come to see him off, he said : " We must leave on time. From now on everything must function to perfection." To the Blackshirts who were on the platform he said : " To-morrow Italy will have not a cabinet, but a government."

Ever ready with the right word, he addressed his legionaries as follows during a halt of his train in the environs of Rome : " Victory is ours, we must not spoil it. Italy is ours ; we must lead her back on to the road of her ancient greatness.

On reaching Rome, as soon as he had got out of the train, his first greeting, addressed to an officer

of high rank, was for the Army. He at once proceeded to the Quirinal to present himself to the King and to form his cabinet, in which he included Diaz and Thaon di Revel, the victors of the War. Placing himself at the head of his legions, who had in the meanwhile entered Rome, he led them through the streets of the city which was now no longer hostile, but joyous, to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and then to do homage to the King at the Quirinal.

XII

IN OFFICE

AS soon as he had formed his cabinet he set to work on the immense tasks awaiting him, and ordered the Blackshirts to return to their respective provinces without the slightest gesture of reprisal against the vanquished foes. Indeed he appointed a party of *squadristi* to guard Facta's person ; the orders were : "Not a hair of his head must be touched, nor must he be made fun of nor humiliated." Less than two years later the ex-Prime Minister was nominated senator by the King on the proposal of Mussolini.

All the initial work was carried out by the new Prime Minister in temporary quarters in an hotel. The Cabinet comprised besides fifteen Fascists, three Nationalists, three Right-Wing Liberals, a few members of the Partito popolare (Catholics) and Democrats ; but they were all chosen on account of their special competence and not as representatives of the various parties.

The Quadrumvirate handed back its powers to the Party directorate, and the Chamber of Deputies was at once summoned, while Mussolini took the chair at the first meetings of a new body not provided for in the Constitution and created by himself—the Fascist Grand Council, which included the leading personalities of all the main activities of the country and which debated and made proposals on

the most essential problems to be solved. The task before Mussolini during these first months was enormous, because he had to deal with the precarious international situation of Italy, face the surviving internal oppositions, place the finances of the country, which were in a state of semi-bankruptcy, once more on a sound basis, and restrain the impulses of the more turbulent of his followers who wanted to take advantage of the victory in all sorts of ways, and of the usual impatient critics who never found anything perfect according to their own abstract theories.

The victory in the streets had been complete ; but after the March on Rome a very delicate phase of general reconstruction, of progressive alterations and substitutions began, during which the difficulties inherent in the circumstances and multiplied by the dispositions and tendencies of men increased to such an extent as to put the resistance of the new regime in process of formation to a hard test. It was necessary to establish discipline and to secure appeasement, to make up for the time lost in the after-War period by the past governments, and build up the new system on solid and lasting foundations.

Mussolini worked unremittingly, almost encamped in the heart of Rome. A general amnesty decree was issued to pacify public feeling after a period of such serious tension ; the Fascists of the fighting squads were incorporated in a new organization, the Voluntary Militia for National Security, the formation of which was indeed a stroke of genius inasmuch as it pledged the scattered energies of the most ardent youths to the task of keeping armed guard over the regime created by the Revolution and rewarded the most enterprising

among them with the responsibilities of a military command.¹

Against the sinister forces of Italian Freemasonry Mussolini resumed the struggle which he had conducted many years previously in his Socialist days both in the province of Forlì and at the Socialist congress of Ancona. A decree was issued whereby all associations were to communicate to the authorities their internal regulations and standing orders and their membership lists ; Freemasonry, which is based on secrecy, preferred to dissolve itself rather than come out into the light of day. It should be remembered too that Italian Freemasonry differed greatly from that of the Anglo-Saxon countries ; in Italy it had always had a definitely political character, anti-Clerical, indeed anti-religious and Leftist, but above all it had tended to disintegrate the discipline of the Civil Service and even of the Army and Navy and of the Judiciary. In many cases it even took its orders in political matters from the Grand Orient of France, acting therefore in the interests of that country rather than in those of Italy. Naturally this aroused against Mussolini and the Fascist regime the most rampant opposition and the most suspect intrigues, both at home and abroad.

In 1923 the Duce brought about the fusion of the Nationalists with the Fascists, a logical but difficult operation, to hasten the movement towards the

¹ The force was composed for the most part of men who had ordinary civil occupations and were only liable to be called out on special occasions, while a small number of officers and N.C.O.s formed the permanent *cadres*. A few permanent battalions were formed of men volunteering for a term of service in Libya. During the Abyssinian War other militia units were formed and distinguished themselves in the campaign. Practically all the Italians who fought in Spain were members of the volunteer militia. At the same time, in spite of an attempt at mutiny, the Guardia Regia which had been created by Nitti in great haste during the worst period of the post-War years and had proved both unsatisfactory and expensive, was disbanded.

unity of all forces sympathetic to the new Government. He ended by breaking off all connection with the Partito popolare, which while it had at first lent him a certain measure of support had subsequently assumed a hostile attitude.¹

In the first two months since the March on Rome he presided over thirty-two Cabinet Councils to provide for the most urgent necessities of the situation inherited from the past and to take advantage of the full powers granted to him by Parliament. He had come before the Chamber of Deputies on November 16, 1922, not to impress the the deputies with one of the usual high-powered Ministerial programmes, but to set forth the future tasks of the Government and make clear the positions of the various groups and tendencies in accordance with the clarity of his own spirit. He had to dominate a Parliament which was still hostile to him. On this point he was quite explicit. "I assert," he declared, "that the Revolution has its own rights. . . . I am here to defend the Revolution of the Blackshirts to the utmost. . . . I have placed limitations on myself, although I might have made of this deaf and dreary Chamber a bivouac of armed squads ; I might have closed Parliament and constituted an exclusively Fascist Government. I might have done so ; but, at all events in this first moment, I have not wished to do so."²

On January 7, 1923, already installed in the Sala della Vittoria³ in the Palazzo Chigi, where with

¹ The Party broke up of itself and its leader, the priest Don Luigi Strugo, who had left Italy, not as an exile, but at the behest of his ecclesiastical superiors.

² The Chamber of Deputies granted him full powers by a very large majority, the Senate almost unanimously. This placed him in a perfectly legitimate Constitutional position.

³ A large fine apartment so called on account of a statue of victory continued in it

unusual speed he had had transferred the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mussolini said to a Genoese deputation : " All that we are doing as a matter of fact is making up arrears of work ; we are liberating the citizens of Italy from the burden of laws which were the result of a policy of bootless demagoguery, we are liberating the State from all the superstructures which were stifling it, from all the economic functions for which it was not suited ; we are working towards the balancing of the budget—this means deflating the currency and it also means taking up a position of dignity and power in the international world."

There was no time to be lost, and Mussolini acted accordingly. General Angelo Gatti,¹ a member of the Italian Academy, reminds us : " In November 1922, a few days after the March on Rome, I asked Mussolini if he would receive me, although I did not yet know him personally, as I wished to suggest the publication of a series of historical works, carefully selected and co-ordinated, on Italy's share in the World War and on that of the Allies. . . . It was twilight on a day of grey clouds and wind ; after listening to me attentively he replied : ' I cannot help you. Not that history is not necessary. But to-day, in Italy there is no time for history. Nothing has yet been brought to a conclusion. We are still in the phase of myths. Everything still remains to be done. And it is only the mystic spirit which can give strength and vigour to a people which is about to hammer out its destiny. History will come later.' I felt on leaving the room as if the dogmas in which I had believed had been outraged and that I had gone back some hundreds of years. But I was wrong. Mussolini did not

¹ A well-known writer on military history.

repudiate history ; only, realizing the necessities of the moment, he placed life before history ; and to temper the people to the splendid but weary task, he resorted to the myth idea, which gives fire to men and creates, instead of to history, which concludes and puts the seal on facts."

Paolo Orano¹ was present when Mussolini was talking on the telephone to a Fascist leader : "Hullo ! Mussolini, Benito Mussolini speaking. Listen to me. You want your Field-Marshal's baton at once. Well, I am not going to give it to you now. Do you understand ? I won't give it to you. You must be satisfied with a switch. So long."

He overcame the test of the first phase of government with the rare courage of knowing how to break away when necessary from those comrades who had been at his side during difficult times, in the sense that he moderated their excessive impulses, their aspirations, hopes, even legitimate ones, but which a chief cannot always satisfy. He did not refrain even from attending to the minutest details of routine work. He refused, however, to waste his time on social or purely representative functions. He kept in touch with the people. He worked night and day, exploiting his own exceptional physical staying power. To those who urged on him to take some rest, so as not to compromise his future personal possibilities, he replied : "It does not matter. It is a case of now or never. We are surgeons at the bedside of a patient in the last extremity. It does not matter if the surgeon is tired ; he must operate at once, without delay. Even if I knew I was going to collapse to-night, I could not take a moment's rest."

He had left his family in his modest flat in Milan

¹ Journalist, deputy, and syndicalist leader.

and devoted himself solely to repair the damage wrought by the past governments, because his criticisms made during the years of struggle had not been the temporary devices of a mere demagogue, but the cry of woe of his own conscience deeply alarmed at the terrible dangers to national interests. He was now making good the evil wrought by others. He also controlled the execution of his orders, without the slightest regard for any of the executors. Many significant stories are told in this connexion. When officials were traditionally accustomed to neglect their work he intervened in person to shake them up. One morning, while visiting one of the Ministries, he happened to meet on the stairs a high official who, after having signed the register, was going about his own private business. The official failed to recognize the Duce, and when asked by him : "What do you mean by leaving the office as soon as you have arrived ?" replied indignantly : "What business is it of yours ? You mind your own business." But he was flabbergasted when the Duce replied : "It just is my business ; I am Mussolini. You go straight to my office to give any explanations which you may have to make, and be ashamed of yourself." Lessons of this kind speeded up the Roman atmosphere, and added to the effects of the daily example offered by Mussolini himself.

Amid all this work in the field of domestic affairs, Mussolini immediately found himself up against the problems of foreign policy, and had to go abroad for his first contacts with the statesmen of other countries, the monopolists of the allied victory who were awaiting him, diffident, curious and anxious to take the measure of this new man at the Lausanne conference for concluding peace with

Turkey. From that moment he set forth the problems of Europe according to a conception of his own of pacifying justice ; but the other statesmen were quite incapable of understanding him. He stepped off at Territet and began by asking Lord Curzon and Poincaré to meet him there. Later, from his hotel at Lausanne he gazed at the bridge under which he had taken refuge twenty years before to overcome hunger with sleep, and he said to the Swiss detective attached to his person : " It is there that your police arrested me." The detective got out of the difficulty by exclaiming : " Such is life, Monsieur le Président ! "

Soon after the March on Rome the generous attitude of the new regime towards everyone flattered the anti-Fascists into believing that they could raise their formerly bowed heads and renew their opposition in Parliament and the Press, while Mussolini was busy repairing the damage done by the old regime. But he was carefully watching every sector and soon spotted the dirty work going on underhand. He now announced the coming of a second tempo of the Fascist Revolution : " I declare that I mean to govern, if possible with the consent of the majority of the citizens ; but while this consent is being formed, moulded, and strengthened, I shall make use of the maximum force available. Possibly, indeed, force may enable us to secure consent, and in any case if consent is lacking, there is always force." The opponents replied with a polemical, acid and academic chorus about outraged liberty and the Constitution violated, but without any other result than that of again producing excitement at the very moment when harmony was most needed for the work of reconstruction. To those who were trying to poison public opinion, the Duce replied

that he would carry out all the reforms required for Italy's new life and necessary to consolidate the regime, adding : " It is indeed strange to see among the upholders of the Constitution those very men who have violated it in its fundamental laws, those who have reduced the prerogative of the Crown." He further reminded them that the Press and the syndicates had reduced the importance of Parliament. Then, without letting himself be drawn into the insidious game of doctrinaire diatribes, he began to visit the provinces, where he was welcomed by enormous crowds with a delirious enthusiasm never witnessed before, proving indeed how thoroughly he was supported by popular feeling.

In July 1923 an Italian military mission, acting under the instruction of the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris, was ambushed and massacred while engaged on delimiting the frontiers between Greece and Albania. The Duce struck with lightning speed and vigour unknown to our traditional diplomacy. He demanded full reparations from Greece, and secured the support of the whole country when he ordered a naval squadron to occupy Corfu with a firmness of decision which astonished the experts and irritated the British Government and the League of Nations ; both became evermore unfriendly to Italy. Anxious days of difficult negotiations followed, but the Italian position was energetically maintained until Italy's demands were satisfied. At the same time Italy resumed commercial relations with Soviet Russia and concluded a political agreement with the Spanish Government, then under General Primo de Rivera.

On December 20, the Duce secured a pact of loyal co-operation between capital and labour, concluded at Palazzo Chigi ; this agreement was the prelude

of more definite agreements which were stipulated a year or two afterwards and to the general principles of the future corporation system. In January 1924 he laid down, before a meeting of journalists, those same fundamental principles which he had preached and practised personally as editor of Socialist newspapers and as founder of the *Popolo d'Italia* : " You are right in doing away with that form of shapeless, ambiguous, spineless professionalism which mortifies the spirit. . . . It is well to repeat that the so-called liberty of the Press is not only a right, but a duty. . . . Outside of this there is no mission, only a trade."

The Chamber elected before the March on Rome was no longer in harmony with the Italian political situation ; consequently it was dissolved. But preparations for the new election by no means absorbed all the activities of the Government, as would have been the case in the past. Mussolini merely summoned the Fascist leaders to Rome for a meeting during which he repudiated that spirit of dissent which was beginning to come to the surface among some of those who had been his supporters from the beginning, but who were unable to adapt themselves to the vaster tasks of the Revolution. He also condemned the attitude of Mussolini-worship which had come to be the fashion among certain people who professed to be admirers of the Duce, but rejected all idea of disciplinary sacrifice, and out of a spirit of rebellion and ultra-individualism refused to co-operate in the complex collective framework.

To the intolerant who, according to the old tradition of the age of servitude and decadence, demanded only an unlimited freedom, he replied : " If there is one man in Italy who is not free, it is I," and he then added : " I accept this servitude as the

highest reward which I can secure." On February 1, 1924, almost as though he wished to revenge himself for the annoyances of the election, he spoke these highly significant words before a group of officers of the Militia whom he had summoned to report at the Augusteo in Rome : " Many are asking what will be your functions during the coming electoral campaign. You must regard them as the minor necessities of daily life. You should not run after this episode. It is all old Italy, *ancien régime*. This sort of thing must be as far from your spirit as it is from mine. Nothing is more absurd than to be thinking of a Mussolini painfully compiling election lists. I am busy in these days with other problems of far greater import for the future life of the Nation than that of selecting the names of those who tomorrow will claim to be the representatives of the Nation. . . . You should regard yourselves as the bearers of a new civilization, as the forerunners of the time to come, as builders laying down the foundations of the edifice, who are effecting the realization of all that was the dream of so many generations during the Italian Risorgimento."

Fascism won the elections of April 1924 with a majority of five million votes against two millions registered for the various opposition parties.

As a result of the Rome treaty of the preceding winter Fiume had been finally annexed to Italy, and for this achievement the King conferred the Order of the Annunciation¹ on the son of the Dovia blacksmith. The motives for this high honour were as follows : " My thoughts go to the great work accomplished by you in this as in other events which

¹ It is the highest honour in the gift of the Crown and confers on the recipient the rank of 'cousin of the King.' Membership of the Order is limited to twenty persons, not counting members of the Royal Family and foreign rulers and statesmen.

have improved the position of Italy among the Nations." Rome acclaimed him on the Capitol by conferring its honorary citizenship on him. There, on the Hill sacred to the Imperial history of the city, the Duce solemnly undertook to promote the greatness of the Urbs, according to a carefully prepared plan. He said : " From the distant days of my youth Rome stood forth immense in my spirit which was then first looking out on life ; of the love of Rome I have dreamed and suffered, and I have ever felt home-sickness for Rome." Out of nothing the greatest dream which could illuminate with a pure ideal the spirit of an Italian had for him been realized. While looking back to his origins he, a Romagnol, did not forget the precursor of his movement in his own land, Alfredo Oriani, and insisted on marching at the head of a party of students to the tomb of the writer at Casola Valsenio to commemorate Oriani, whom his contemporaries, the men who had sacrificed Crispi, had ignored.

After the successful result of the election Mussolini addressed a vigorous exhortation to his fellow countrymen : " Let all factions perish, even our own, provided the country be safe." But the opposition did not respond to this generous appeal ; indeed it intensified its attacks with increasing bitterness in the vain hope of regaining its lost positions. Its newspapers published articles containing open threats, such as the following : ' The time for the barricades appears imminent on the political horizon, and we mean to operate in such a manner as to render it as imminent as possible.' Many Fascists were ambushed and murdered. Even in foreign countries the tale of murder began with that of Nicola Bonservizi, correspondent of the *Popolo*

d'Italia in Paris.¹ The series of moral and material provocations was intensified by the bitterness of the opponents after their defeat at the polls. Nevertheless Mussolini forbade any sort of reprisals by the Fascists. After a visit to Sicily he delivered a speech in the Chamber of Deputies which made a great impression on account of its generous tone, but it did not serve to break the ambitious and sinister expectations of the irreducible enemies.

¹ By the end of 1928, according to a French paper, over eighty murders or woundings of Fascists by anti-Fascists had been committed in France; hardly one of those guilty received more than a nominal punishment, and most of them were acquitted.

XIII

THE ATTEMPTED COME-BACK

IT is inevitable that no great idea, no high passion can ever affirm itself unless it has gone through hard and tragic experience, because the adverse forces and those of conservation, the hostility of the evil-minded and of a mean folk who cannot understand, always bar the way. After the many murders of Fascists, and in the mind of the Duce the idea began to take the shape of affirming in Rome a universal idea without which it is not possible to rule in the Eternal City, the spirit of the masses had still to be moulded to overcome the imperfections and detrita of the customs of the past.

Contemporaneously with the hostility of the opponents, the personal jealousies of the Fascists themselves who were more or less satisfied after the triumph of October 1922 awoke once more, and Mussolini had to devote time and labour to reorganize the ranks of the Party which had been broken up here and there by the exaggerations of the dissenters, the intrigues of the ambitious, the crafty, and the greedy, the slowness of certain followers in adapting themselves to the new situation, the flattering and inopportune zeal of the late-comers drawn in the wake of success and the impetuous personal action of certain lieutenants in the provinces.

As far back as the months preceding the March on Rome the Duce had had to bear this dead weight,

and he said : " Italy is bottled up in the Adriatic, a small basin just good enough to wash one's face in. Before the problems of world-policy the Mediterranean itself is small ; we debouch now on two oceans. But I cannot deal with these matters, you understand me, because of the brawl at Peretola which demands my attention, because at Gorgonzola or at Roccacannuccia they have come to fist-cuffs ; somebody has been killed, the whole of Italy thinks of nothing else." And he had to devote his prophetic genius to these daily trifles, exhorting, correcting, punishing. " We must put an end to this spirit of the drug-store,¹ a mean and timid state of little Italy."

In June 1924 the Gordian knot of opponents and dissidents had to be cut. On the 10th of that month an ugly deed was done ; in Rome, a group of irresponsible individuals kidnapped the Socialist deputy Matteotti, who had been an uncompromising neutralist during the War and an insidious and stubborn anti-Fascist afterwards. He was killed in the struggle which took place in the car, and his body abandoned by the kidnappers in a remote spot of the Roman province. The news of this event aroused immense astonishment inasmuch as until that day no Socialist leader had suffered in person any penalty for seditious conduct which often exposed ignorant workmen to violent encounters. Although soon afterwards the Fascist deputy Armando Casalini, a poor, generous, intelligent syndical organizer, was murdered by an anti-Fascist, nevertheless the mass of the anti-Fascists continued to attack the Party and the Government with incredible fury, and their newspapers set themselves

¹ In small Italian towns at the chemist's shop is the centre of the gossip and amateur politicians.

out to conduct a violent campaign to incite public opinion to rebellion.

As Mussolini refused to repress that insane orgy at once and would not even introduce any form of censorship, Italy underwent a period of many months of painful crisis, not very different in its aspect to that of the gloomy days which followed Caporetto. Fascism was almost in a state of siege, while its leaders were covered with abuse ; the body of Matteotti, which was discovered at a spot called La Quartarella, was exploited in the most ignoble manner, there were demands for the disbanding of the Militia and for the impeachment of the regime. The deputies of all the opposition groups left the Chamber and demanded that those who were alleged to be responsible be impeached before the High Court of Justice. Various memoranda by notorious forgers were disseminated, the whole country was flooded with newspapers and manifestoes filled with falsehoods, insults, and incitements to hatred, the object being to isolate the Duce. A few Fascist deputies ratted and took refuge in the provinces, either from fear or as a result of a conscientious crisis. One or two repudiated their faith, and some others turned traitor.

Mussolini, however, faced the cyclone unmoved and continued his solitary labour ; he felt sure of his destiny in spite of the blow which seemed to have broken him. He said : " Only an enemy who through many long nights had meditated something diabolical against me could have committed this crime." Morally intangible, he went through this tragic vicissitude holding his head high, as he had done when he had been expelled by the Socialists for his action in support of Italian intervention in

the War. He punished the guilty, gave orders that justice should proceed inexorably, he sacrificed some of his closest collaborators to prove that the regime sheltered no one ; but he refused to give way to the suggestions of timid counsellors and held out in the certainty that he would ride the storm successfully, although abandoned by many. " You know," he said to Paolo Orano at the time, " that I shall remain at my post ; when one sees how greatly the number of bowed backs increases it makes a certain impression. What a selection ! I shall not budge. If a corpse has been thrown between my feet to force me to give up office, people will find that they are mistaken. To-day I feel more than ever that it is my duty to remain at my post. I and the destiny of Italy are one."

" Should I leave the work of the Regime unfinished, in the hands of those people, at the mercy of all the old and the new adventurers ? " he asked. " No. I shall not budge from here, and remember, this means the safety of all that crowd, because the day in which I were to become a popular leader in the streets once more they would be lost. But I govern Italy, and government does not mean vengeance, and I am not here merely in transit. I forbade the firing squads after October 28, at a moment when the Revolution might have followed the methods of all revolutions. I mean to prove, by resisting this onrush of infamy, that this Regime can triumph without bloodshed, and the Party and Government are a single force. I do not abandon myself to petty chronicles : I make history."

He felt that in the provinces the faithful Black-shirts were fretting while waiting for a sign from him to drive back the great Beast into its lair. Against the new insults they gathered together spontaneously

in the *piazze*, as in the days of the struggle for intervention ; as in those when the armed squads were liberating town after town from Red tyranny. In Bologna, on a single day, fifty thousand Fascists foregathered from various districts, impatiently anxious to start a counter-offensive. Mussolini, however, warned them that 'the more the opposition swells, the more dropsical and impotent does it become. . . . If by "normalization" the impeachment of the Regime is intended, the Regime will not allow itself to be impeached except by history.' In the meanwhile, 'Keep your hands in your pockets, until the Matteotti uproar has worked itself out to the point of absurdity and ridicule.'

His patience was incredible, his tolerance and self-control unparalleled. 'I am bound, not by my own caprice, but by my duty as a soldier.' His inner suffering did not ask for any help or consolation. He only gave one warning : 'If our opponents wish to place the matter on a basis of force, we shall act accordingly.' Only when the various parties congregated on the symbolical Aventine,¹ and their papers reached the point of incitement to revolt and tried to get round the ex-service men and the war disabled veterans in the hope of driving them against Fascism, itself a movement of ex-service men and mutilated veterans, the Duce had a magnificent outburst which consoled him and his followers. Addressing the miners on Monte Amiata, he said : "The day on which those creatures cease their tiresome vociferations and come to practical action, on that day we shall make of them litter for the encampments of the Blackshirts."

¹ The Aventine was the hill on which the plebeians of ancient Rome withdrew during a civil conflict. The anti-Fascists' withdrawal from the Chamber was called by that name. Some foreign journalists believed that the deputies had actually retired on to that hill !

At the Leghorn congress the Liberals too passed over to the Opposition. In the enemy's ranks there now grew up the illusion that the Fascist Government was coming to an end ; but Mussolini, at an open-air meeting in Milan, said these words : " From this moment I fix an appointment with you in this same *piazza* a year hence," and he was determined to keep his engagement. In October 1924 he reaffirmed his confidence in a speech at Cremona, that Fascism was going to last and to win through, and sketched out a programme of political action actually realized during the following years.

In the winter the persistent, violent opposition grew ever more bitter, and culminated in insults beyond all limits during the last days of December. The enemy knew that even among the members of the Cabinet there were more than one who were gravely impressed and weary to the point of suggesting surrender. But at the very moment when things seemed at their darkest the will of the Leader was stiffened for a vigorous counter-offensive. A summoning of the Cabinet was interpreted as a prelude to resignation ; one or two newspapers got ready an extra special edition with a list of the new Ministry. But it was not issued, as Mussolini came out with his lightning stroke. A few police measures made the pusillanimous adversaries withdraw hastily into their lairs, intimidated as they already were by the arrival in Rome of a hundred or so of the Fascist Militia who had come from Florence and Ferrara to say, if necessary, the last word.

XIV

PLENARY POWERS

ON January 3, 1925, Mussolini put his foot very definitely down with a speech in the Chamber which cleared the ground of all misunderstanding, solved the situation, indeed radically altered it, and opened a new period of our history, just as the article entitled 'Audacia !' in the first issue of the *Popolo d'Italia* had done. Mussolini peremptorily took upon himself full responsibility for what had happened. He challenged and defied the 'Aventine,' saying : " No one has denied me up to the present these three qualities : a certain measure of intelligence, much courage and an utter contempt for filthy lucre. . . . Well, I say here, in the presence of this assembly and of the whole Italian people that I take upon myself full responsibility, political, moral, and historic, for all that has happened. If phrases, more or less twisted, are sufficient to hang a man, then out with the gallows and the rope ! If Fascism has been nothing more than castor oil and bludgeons, and not instead a magnificent passion of all that is best in Italian youth, the fault is mine ! If Fascism has proved to be a criminal association, if all acts of violence have been the result of a particular historic, political and moral atmosphere, I am responsible for all, because this historic, political and moral atmosphere has been created by me through a propaganda extending from Italy's intervention until to-day. . . . Italy, gentlemen, wants peace, wants tranquillity, wants industrious calm ; these

we shall give her, through love if possible, through force if necessary. You may rest certain that within the forty-eight hours following my speech, the situation will have cleared throughout the area, so to speak. Let everyone understand that it is not a question of personal caprice, of lust for power, of ignoble passion ; it is a powerful and unlimited love for the country."

Thus, on the very eve of its expected triumph, the enemy front found itself tied down by its practical impotence to the pillory of infamy and even of ridicule. On January 3 the liquidation of the 'Aventine' began and was rapidly concluded, in spite of a few sporadic and confused attempts at resistance.

In Mussolini's mind both the Matteotti affair and its consequences had by now been discounted ; all his efforts were concentrated on other aims. He had a clear vision of a new period to be initiated, the constructive period for the physical and moral formation of the Fascist people, for revolutionary legislation and Imperial expansion. The provincial crises in the Fascist groups, the internal conflicts in the country and Parliamentary polemics were now definitely to give way to a new system of national life based on work and inspired by an ideal of national greatness and on a Roman spirit of discipline. Command must be concentrated, all dispersion of energy averted, partisan and sterile criticism and sectarian influences eliminated, while the people must devote themselves to constructive effort, acquire a full sense of national dignity and ensure the continuity of the Revolution throughout the new generations.

The Duce set himself to this new life task immediately after the defeat of the 'Aventine,' and after his recovery from a serious illness which obliged

him to keep to his house for several weeks during the early part of 1925. Naturally that enforced absence gave fresh hopes to his opponents, but these hopes were not destined to be realized, as the whole Nation, after the recent trials, was now arrayed in support of Fascism. In their inner conscience the Italians felt that Mussolini's Government had laid the foundations for a great future through the intense activity of these first two years, and were determined that the work should continue. Italy had in fact risen from a purely nominal position as a great Power to the level of the other great nations. Her voice had secured a hearing, after many humiliations, in international councils and conferences ; Fiume was part of the territory of the kingdom, the budget had been balanced, the air force reconstituted, the educational system reformed, a very large number of pacts of friendship and commercial treaties concluded, the possession of the Dodecanese definitely secured, local, regional, and personal squabbles eliminated, and the unity of the Fascist Party established with the creation of a single secretariat entrusted to Roberto Farinacci.¹ At the same time the necessary Constitutional reforms were undertaken by a commission of experts, popularly known as 'the Solons,' the position of the Militia regulated by being included in the fighting services of the State, and its members taking the oath to the King, and the country's foreign service renovated with the elimination of certain undesirable elements. Mussolini himself had been to London at the end of 1922 in connexion with the Reparations question, and in 1924 he had met Sir Austen Chamberlain, with whom he contracted a strong personal friendship. Great Britain handed over the Transjuba

¹ Political man and journalist, at one time secretary of the Party, member of the Grand Council, Minister of State, now editor of *Regime fascista*, fought in the Ethiopian campaign, where he lost his right hand.



Photo Luce

ROSA MALTONI MUSSOLINI, THE DUCE'S MOTHER



Photo Luce

ALESSANDRO MUSSOLINI, THE DUCE'S FATHER

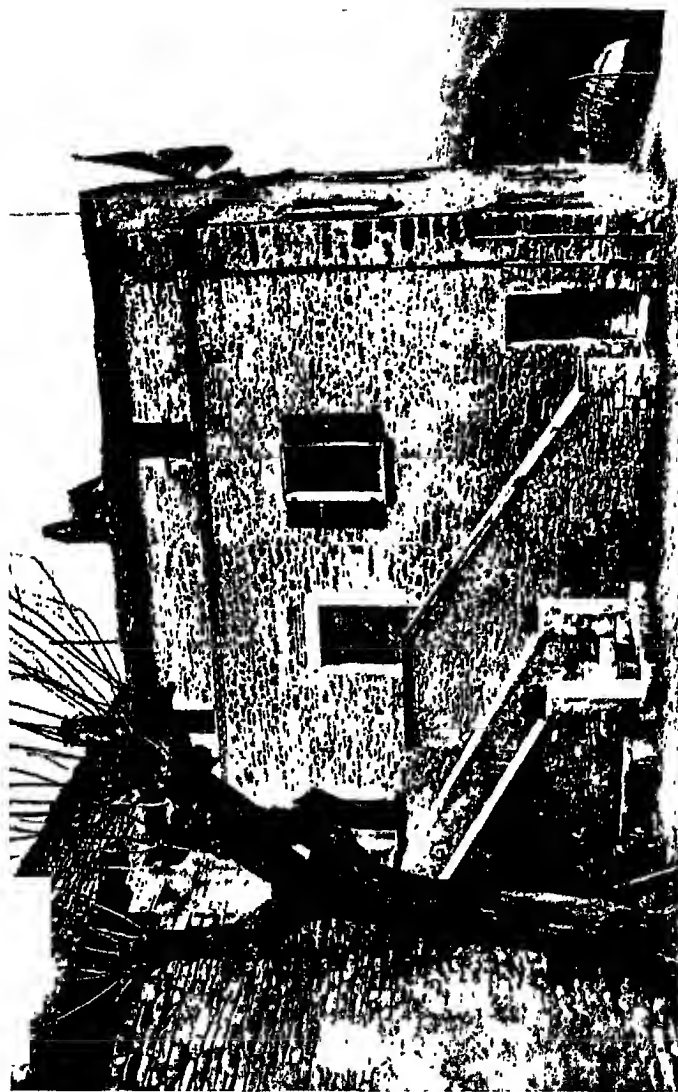


Photo Luce

MUSSOLINI'S BIRTHPLACE AT PREDAPPIO

district in East Africa and the Jarabub oasis on the border between Egypt and Cyrenaica to Italy in conformity with the colonial clauses of the Pact of London.

All this work of reconstruction proceeded without pause while the ordinary routine administration continued as usual, even during the difficult months of the political crisis over the Matteotti affair. The driving power of the Duce secured the confidence of the people and aroused its constructive fervour. All Italians felt that great developments in their destinies were imminent and that a new civilization was about to arise out of the chaos of the past. Immediately after the gloomy interlude during which everything seemed to be lost they set to work once more under the guidance of the Leader.

In August 1924 Mussolini, at a meeting of Fascist leaders in Palazzo Venezia, gave his word of command, "To live dangerously," warning his hearers that he rejected the querulous exhortations of the lukewarm who wished to 'normalize' the situation if not actually to turn back. He instead, as soon as he recovered from his illness, appeared before the applauding Fascists and from the balcony of Palazzo Chigi gave the announcement: "Now the good time is coming!" He then warmly praised his faithful supporters in the provinces and concluded: "If I have not acted with great force it is due to the fact that I have not met any resistance whatever." As a matter of fact the members of the 'Aventine,' at the moment when they should have risked taking practical action, after so much talk and such torrents of printed words, had run away.

The non-Fascist members of the Cabinet were now asked to resign. A greater unity of driving principles and a more uncompromising attitude

characterized the period in which the ultra-Fascist laws, calculated to establish the Revolution in every phase of the nation's life and transform it ever more thoroughly, were being drafted.

The Duce himself laid down all the guiding principles and took charge of the three military Ministries himself. In a short time the Council of State, the system of taxation, and the police services were reorganized, the powers of the prefects extended, the Civil Service and the Judiciary reformed, the railways placed on a sound basis, the ex-Austrian provinces settled, Tripolitania, and later Cyrenaica were reconquered as a result of a vigorous military and political action, some of the Sultanates of Somaliland annexed, all the Masonic lodges and secret societies dissolved, the onerous death duties abolished¹ between next of kin which destroyed family estates, the mayors replaced by the podestàs, war pensions given a definite settlement. All these early reforms culminated in the law which created the rank and Constitutional position of the Prime Minister, on whom as Head of the Government were conferred full autonomy and wide powers with respect to Parliament and the other members of the Cabinet.

In the early spring a lively debate took place in the Senate on the reorganization of the Army. A scheme of reform submitted by the Minister of War, General Di Giorgio, had aroused serious objections on the part of several generals who were members of the Senate and had been army or corps commanders during the War. Mussolini had to tackle the problem in person, and suggested what he regarded as the best solution in a speech which made a great impression on account of its logical force, and the

¹ Later, owing to fiscal necessities during the depression, the death duties had to be restored, but on a very small percentage basis.

fact that it revealed unusual powers of assimilation and clarification on the part of the Duce; even the most sceptical confessed to admiration. That speech laid the foundations of the existing organization of the Army.

While discussing the law affecting Freemasonry, Mussolini made the following statement: "During these last months I have noticed that Freemasonry has placed its affiliates in what I call the nerve-centres of Italian life. It is monstrous that officials of the highest ranks should attend the lodges, inform the lodges, take orders from the lodges. . . . I believe that with this law Freemasonry (which on another occasion I described as a screen and which is not a mountain as it appears when seen from a distance but rather a toy balloon which must at a certain moment be pricked) will show what it really is, a survival which has no longer any decent reason for existence in the present century. Then there is for me—I am a peasant and I am proud of it—a much stronger reason, and it is this: we must do the greatest possible good to our friends and the greatest possible harm to our enemies. This maxim was not invented by a Fascist, neither one of the first to join us nor one of the last; it is a dictum of Socrates."

On June 6, 1925, the Jubilee of King Victor Emmanuel's III's reign was celebrated in the Chamber of Deputies and the Duce extolled the personality of the Sovereign, whom he defined as 'wise and victorious,' with the following words: "He believes in war and makes war, a soldier among soldiers; he believed in it, even when in a period of uncertainty many doubted, but he, at Peschiera, did not doubt."¹

Mussolini's exceptional power of harmonizing words with deeds, of defining facts with crystal

¹ This refers to the meeting at Peschiera, after Caporetto, between the King and the Italian and Allied statesmen and generals.

clearness and of achieving with the expression of ideas that state of mind whence the faith and the actions of the masses arise, was manifested in the speech which he delivered on June 22 at the conclusion of the Party congress held at the Augusteo. The political values of the Revolution, its ideal principles, the line of conduct adopted by the Regime for the present and for the future emerged from the statements which he made in that speech, a speech which was to prove one of the bases of Fascism at the very moment when the phase of achievement was about to begin. His watchwords were: "Absolute, ideal, and practicable intransigence. All power to all Fascism." He burnt his bridges with the past, saying: "To-day Fascism is a party, a militia, a corporation. Nor is this enough; it must become something more, it must become a manner of life. We must have Italians of the Fascist Era, as we have had the Italians of the Renaissance, standing out differently from all others, Italians of the Latinity. It is only by creating a manner of life, that is to say a manner of living, that we can mark the milestones in history and not merely in the chronicles of day-to-day events. What is this manner of life? Courage, first of all; intrepidity, love of risk, repugnance for those who think only of their bellies and of avoiding trouble, being ever ready to dare both in individual and collective life, and to abhor all that is sedentary. . . . The goal is there; Empire."

Anti-Fascism in its death-agony turned to a desperate and criminal attempt to strike down the man to whom, above all others, the Italian nation was devoted, while the more uncompromising opponents fled abroad under the delusion that they would soon be able to return after the hoped-for

and ever-predicted collapse of Fascism. They counted on the help of international forces hostile to the movement and alarmed at the unexpected and unwelcome spectacle of a revived Italy. Thus a second phase of the struggle appeared about to develop on the wider European stage.

Nevertheless, it was at that time that Mussolini was anxious only to ensure enough bread for the whole people through the peaceful 'battle of wheat' undertaken to provide a more intensive production and one of better quality, also to avoid the heavy burden of foreign wheat imports. He undertook to fight to the bitter end against malaria, and continued his periodical visits to the various cities and provinces, the last of which was to the city of Milan, in accordance with the undertaking made the preceding year during the political hurricane. At a meeting in the Scala Theatre he announced: "This is our formula—all within the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State." At the same time he enjoined on the Italian Fascists residing in foreign lands certain well-defined duties, the first of which was the most exemplary respect for the laws of the States whose hospitality they were enjoying. He signed the Locarno Pact whereby Italy undertook, in the interest of peace, to guarantee together with Great Britain the Franco-German frontier.

In an article published in *Gerarchia* he summed up the various phases of the activities of the Regime, recalling the fact that in the previous April the Fascist Grand Council had tackled the age-long problem of Southern Italy, creating the *Provveditorati*¹ which were to find a practical solution for it; furthermore during the summer—he had taken no

¹ Offices entrusted with the carrying out of public works.

summer holiday that year—he had undertaken another battle, that of saving and re-valuing the lira.

Nevertheless, at the end of 1925 and during 1926 no less than four attempts were made on Mussolini's life. The series began with that of the Socialist ex-deputy Zaniboni, hired for the purpose with the complicity of others to commit the crime. Zaniboni was discovered and arrested in an hotel bedroom, from the windows of which he intended to shoot the Duce with a rifle when he appeared at the balcony of Palazzo Chigi for the anniversary ceremony of Italy's final victory in the War. Reaction was prompt, but not ferocious : the Masonic lodges were occupied and the Unitary Socialist Party was proclaimed illegal and dissolved, while the Duce issued stringent orders that there were to be no disturbances. As at the time of the Matteotti affair the Fascists had to restrain their indignation, and hundreds of *squadristi* were detained in prison for trifling illegalities. But the moral reaction was immense : the King, the Queen Mother, the Royal Princes expressed execration for the attempted crime and rejoiced at the Duce's escape. Pope Pius XI defined Mussolini ' the Man of Providence,' and the crowd acclaimed him loudly. On that occasion he said : " If I had been hit at this balcony, not a tyrant but the servant of the Italian people would have been struck down."

The reaction, of course, was more violent after the second attempt committed on April 7, 1926, by a Irishwoman whose revolver bullet actually hit Mussolini in the nose as he was coming out of the Capitol after opening a medical congress. In spite of his wound he did not alter the programme of work he had drawn up for the next few days. That same evening he inaugurated the new

Directorate of the Party and prepared to sail for Tripoli. He told his comrades not to be anxious, because "everything that happens around me leaves me indifferent. . . . To you I say, as an old fighter, if I advance follow me, if I fall back kill me, if I die avenge me." The would-be murderess, in view of her mental condition, was sent back to her home. The next day, while sailing towards North Africa on the battleship *Conte di Cavour*, he said to a group of Party authorities: "We are Mediterraneans, and our destiny, without any need to copy others, is and always will be on the sea." Later, addressing a Milanese audience, he said: "Bullets pass by, but Mussolini stays."

On September 11, of the same year a certain Lucetti, a wretched criminal hired by the anti-Fascists in France, threw a bomb at the Duce's car as he was driving from Villa Torlonia to Palazzo Chigi. The bomb ricocheted from the pavement and exploded without touching Mussolini, but wounding several passers-by. On reaching Palazzo Chigi the Duce received the British Ambassador with whom he had an appointment, and the diplomat learned with astonishment of what had occurred only when the crowd began to demonstrate under the windows and demanded to see the Duce at the balcony. He addressed the applauding masses, enjoining on them once more that public order must not be disturbed, but added that an end must be put to these criminal conspiracies once for all, and that new measures were in preparation for preventing such attempts which menaced not so much his own person as the peaceful progress of Italian life. These measures were not yet enacted when on October 31, 1926, the fourth attempt was committed at Bologna just before the Duce's

departure from the city at the end of a laborious day. At the congress of the Association for the Progress of Science, in the historic Archiginnasio, he had spoken of the highest problems of knowledge and of human destiny, making this interesting reservation : "What have I personally contributed to science? Exactly nothing at all. What have I contributed as Head of the Government? Still very little." A few minutes later, as he was driving out of the building, a certain Zamboni, a youth led astray by sinister suggestions, fired a revolver at him ; the bullet hit the satin sash of one of his decorations but left him uninjured. The exasperated crowd executed summary justice on the would-be assassin—probably the only case of lynching which has ever occurred in Italy. The Duce reassured the anxious faithful, telling them that "nothing can happen to me until my task is accomplished."

But the cup was now full. To ensure the safety of the State, which could not be left to the mercy of individual sectarian fury, measures to control the Press were enacted, the seditious revolutionary parties were proclaimed illegal, the death penalty was instituted for the gravest forms of crime, including the murder or attempted murder of the King, the Heir to the Throne, and of the Prime Minister, and non-political murders of a peculiarly heinous nature calculated to cause grave disturbance ; a special tribunal for political crime was set up, and a measure introduced whereby citizens regarded as undesirable, whether for political or moral offences, could be assigned to some particular place of residence (either the Islands in the Mediterranean or in small towns in any part of Italy).

XV

THE GREAT REFORMS

THE nation was as exasperated and as anxious for the safety of the Duce as he was determined to ensure the safety of the nation. From that moment Italian life was definitely dominated by a new order, a virile discipline, and a complete harmony of general sentiment.

Other plotters, who had been sent to Italy by enemies living abroad to attempt Mussolini's life, failed and suffered the penalty which those who had hired them dare not face. Mussolini was surrounded by the genuine devotion of the Italian people, who were proud of having in him a leader endowed with almost uncanny insight, who had completely altered the situation of the country in the world, and who proved invariably successful.

One day Mussolini, on getting out of the car together with a member of one of the most illustrious Italian families, noticed a poor man leaning against the door of the nobleman's palace and staring at him without saying a word. The Prime Minister at once gave him a banknote, and to his friend, who seemed surprised at this gesture, said: "You are mistaken, but it is not your fault. Only he who has suffered hunger can understand the meaning of the suppliant appeal of another man who is hungry."

Since the March on Rome Mussolini had, as we

have seen, periodically visited the various provinces to ascertain their necessities, to keep constantly in touch with the local Fascists and with the population as a whole, and to find out their state of mind and aspirations. He took to flying again, and also travelled by sea, regulated his days according to a strict method, imposed on himself and on his collaborators such a perfectly orderly manner of work as to multiply his already inordinate capacity for output. He alternated his serious duties as Head of the Government and of the Party with physical exercise and frequent periods spent in the fields of his own Romagna. The authorities found considerable difficulty in keeping up with him in his rapid marches, his motor races which were only held up when the waiting crowds came to meet him and surrounded him, in Sardinia as in Sicily, in Naples as in Turin, in Florence as in Bologna.

He took a particular interest in welfare work on behalf of the most needy, helped artists, and dealt with matters concerning philosophy, science, technical problems, and the fighting services. He gave audience to thousands of people, proved responsive to all suggestions for useful initiatives, and laid down definite principles in every sector of the nation's life. He devoted his attention uninterruptedly to great things and little, and was ever ready to face unexpected emergencies. He would often pick up passers-by whom he encountered on the road and had been victims of accidents. On one occasion he was stopped by a traffic policeman, who had failed to recognize him, for having exceeded the speed limit and was asked to pay the fine ; when the policeman realized who he was he appeared greatly embarrassed, but the Duce

paid the fine and praised him for having carried out his duties. On another occasion, while driving towards a small town in the province of Vicenza, he was stopped by a little girl who asked him to convey her to that very town because she wished to arrive in time to see Mussolini ; he took her on board and assured her that she certainly would see the Duce.

In the very year in which the attempts on his life had been made he undertook two schemes of great importance for the life of Italy and the development of the Regime.

One was the defence of the currency against the insidious attacks of international finance inspired either by lack of confidence in the Fascist system or by the intention of striking it down ; this policy was preceded by a regular settlement of Italy's War debts towards Great Britain and the United States. For this purpose Count Volpi was sent to Washington and London, and the question was satisfactorily settled in both capitals, so that Italy proved to be the first of the debtor States which came to an agreement with the creditor States over the undertaking which had been contracted. It was at that moment that the initiative was taken by a group of Genoese workmen to raise a popular subscription of one dollar a head to pay the first instalment to the United States. As, however, the economic and financial uncertainty persisted, Mussolini, while paying a visit to Pesaro, issued an explicit statement which definitely squelched the currency speculators and guaranteed the defence of those who had saved money : " From this *piazza*, I say to the whole world that I shall defend the lira to the very last breath, to the last drop of blood. I shall not inflict on this

marvellous Italian people, who for the last four years have been working like heroes and suffering like saints, the moral outrage and the economic catastrophe of the collapse of the lira." He kept his word and forced the currency bears and the foolish believers in the inflationist paradise to hide their heads for very shame. Gradually and amid grave difficulties the lira was re-valued and eventually stabilized at ninety to the £. (December 1927).¹

The time had come to face the question of solving the social problem in the manner in which Fascism had always maintained that it ought to be solved from the very beginnings of the movement, viz. by overcoming class conflict through the principle of the collaboration of all the categories of producers according to principles of economic justice within the framework of collective interests. Fascism is a people's Regime, and the State, as the sole, supreme guardian of the national destinies, must protect property, labour, capital, and private enterprise for the common good. But to guarantee rights it also imposes duties and rejects any attempt by capital to oppress labour or by labour to strangle capital. To the already very important organization of syndicates grouped in federations and confederations, legal recognition must be conferred and regulations laid down for them concerning collective labour contracts, while they must be guaranteed by means of special labour courts competent to deal with these disputes.

These basic principles were laid down in the Labour Charter, a veritable Magna Charta of the new Italian productive society. The corporative

¹ The lira retained this gold value even after the £ had fallen; but in 1937 the fall of other currencies brought it down too, but it still retains the ratio of ninety to the £.

or guild system completed the structure which in successive phases and by a process of trial and error built up what may be regarded as the fundamental and most original creation of the Fascist Regime, the characteristic contribution of Mussolini to the solution of the social problem. It was afterwards to prove the basis for the reform of the Constitution and the formation of the new ruling class, the elimination of the alternative predominance now of one class and now of another, or the rule of a single narrow group of interests and individuals in the government of the country, camouflaged as democratic representation through popular suffrage. The spirit of the nation was now ready to accept these reforms and strikes and lock-outs had definitely ceased.

The pressure of domestic policies did not distract the Duce from attending to the interests of Italians living abroad. At the beginning of 1926 he had a passage-at-arms with the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Herr Stresemann, with reference to the Alto Adige, warning him that Italy flatly refused to admit of any discussion of the Brenner frontier, regarded by all Italians as sacred. Then, after writing a monograph on Machiavelli—in a sense a fitting conclusion to his readings with his father of Machiavelli's 'Principe,' he delivered a lecture at Perugia on the sea power of ancient Rome, and in his message to the Italians on the fourth anniversary of the Fascist Revolution he summed up all the achievements accomplished in the period, mentioning the reform of the law codes, which had then been undertaken, the creation of the Balilla organization,¹ the National Organiza-

¹ The national Fascist Youth Organization, now absorbed into the G.I.L. (Gioventù italiana del Littorio).

tion for Maternity and Infant Welfare, the Provincial Economic Councils, the Forest and Frontier Militia, the reform of civil aviation, the Central Statistical Institute, pre-military education,¹ the law on copyright,² the National Export Institute, the concentration of currency issues in the Bank of Italy, the great public works in course of execution, and the launching of a fleet of fast Ocean liners. He also alluded to Italy's new colonial policy and the policy of internal migration, both of which were to take the place of the exodus of emigrants to foreign lands when they had been unable to find work at home. He warned his readers and hearers that the mentality and customs of the Italians would have to be renovated and liberated from the psychological sediments of the old democratic-liberal Italy.

Until the enactment of the ultra-Fascist laws Mussolini regarded the work accomplished as still inadequate. As far back as 1923 he had written to the staff of the *Impero*: 'Your article concluding with the request that I should consider myself sacred has simply terrified me. I must beg you, dear friends, not to strike this note and to leave me in peace in my profanity.'

He depreciated the value of what had already been done and concentrated on the future, determined as he was to effect yet greater things. He set forth these intentions on March 23, 1926: 'If Fascism succeeds, as I trust it will, in moulding the character of the Italians, you may rest certain that when the wheel of fate passes within our reach we shall be ready to seize it and to guide it according to our will.'

This was not a mere rhetorical phrase—Mussolini

¹ A measure whereby young men receive a preliminary military training before performing their regular military service.

² Now being reformed.

has always felt a repugnance for rhetoric. When he raises his tone it is to set forth in synthesis a definite situation in its supreme values or to predict future developments which really do materialize. Thus it was, after his circular to the prefects and the Labour Charter issued in the early months of 1927, and his Ascension Day speech in the Chamber of Deputies, so-called both because it was delivered on the day of that religious festival and because it indicated the path of Italy's spiritual and material ascension. In this latter speech Mussolini sketched the programme of Fascist policy for the following ten years.

The speech begins : " This is one of the days in which I place the Nation face to face with itself." He first examined the problem of the physical health of the race in which he defined as suicidal the theory of *laissez faire, laissez aller*. He pointed out the increase of social diseases, particularly tuberculosis, and this marked the beginning of the nation-wide campaign which was afterwards taken up with notable success against that illness. But above all he raised the alarm over the incipient demographic decadence. It was a cry of passionate anxiety which came unexpectedly at a time when everyone was deceived by the common belief in our alleged excessive birth-rate.

He repeated and tirelessly warned the Nation that numbers alone mean power, that demographic decline is a grave indication of decadence for a people, that only life calls up life, that political and even economic crises are due to the decline of the population and never to its increase, that population decline is closely connected with moral degeneracy that Fascism must react inasmuch as the fate of nations is bound up with their demographic power.

In this connexion he denounced the dangers of industrial urbanism which promotes the barrenness of peoples. "If we diminish, gentlemen, we do not make an Empire, we become a colony!" Hence the necessity of a vigorous ruralizing policy. With reference to the problem of public safety, he reminded his audience of the various successful undertakings of the Regime, above all the complete suppression of the *mala vita* (criminal underworld) and the notorious Sicilian *mafia*. He pointed out that the recent police measures, enacted in consequence of the various political outrages, were in no way comparable with the wholesale massacres effected by other revolutions, remote or contemporary, from the French Revolution to the Russian reign of terror. To those who insisted on the intrinsic need for some sort of opposition, he retorted: "We flatly and indignantly reject arguments of this kind. Opposition is idiotic and superfluous in a totalitarian regime such as Fascism. Opposition is useful in easy times, in academic times. . . . But we have opposition within ourselves, my good friends; we are not old nags needing the spur; we control ourselves strictly. We find opposition above all in material things, in objective difficulties, in life itself, which offers a vast mountain of opposition, capable of wearing out spirits even superior to mine." He warned his hearers that the maintenance of public order was not enough; a totalitarian regime, to enjoy the confidence and support of the masses, must penetrate still deeper, and above all ensure moral order. He extolled youth, and noted its unanimous support and the formation of a new ruling class. He asserted that "to-morrow we shall be able, when between 1935 and 1940, we shall have reached what I may call a



Photo Lurr

MUSSOLINI WORKING IN THE RECLAIMED PONTINE AREA



Photo Luce

MUSSOLINI AT THE HEAD OF A DETACHMENT OF BERSAGLIERI

crucial point in the history of Europe, to make our voice heard and at last see our rights recognized."

After the ultra-Fascist laws the situation was radically altered, and he therefore concluded: "What have we done in these five years? We have done something truly great, monumental, which will go down through the ages. What is it? We have created the unitary State of Italy. . . . This State finds expression in a centralized, organized, unified democracy, wherein the people move about at their good will, because, gentlemen, either you bring the people into the citadel of the State and they will defend it, or they remain outside and then they will assault it . . . I tell you that within ten years this Italy of ours will be unrecognizable to herself and to strangers, because we shall have transformed her radically in her outward aspect, but above all in her soul."

Outside his political work Mussolini never wasted time in futile distractions, but he never neglected physical exercise. His only repose was always that of changing his occupations. The country-side, the people and their activities never had dead ends or unknown corners for him; he inquired into everything, and wanted to be informed of everything, especially of the unpleasant things. His orders to the carabinieri¹ were: "Tell the truth." From the very first days of his premiership he gave orders that he was never to be woken up at night after his days of intense work to be given agreeable news. Only in case of serious occurrences, demanding immediate decisions did he wish to be called up at any hour of the day or the night.

Amid the most arduous problems ever pressing on him day by day, he continued to attend to all

¹ A military police force with certain powers of judicial investigation.

the details which make up the picture of Italian life. He dealt with the town planning scheme for Rome calculated to restore to the city its ancient splendour, the excavations at Herculaneum, the recovery of the Roman galleys submerged in the lake of Nemi, co-operation, and the cinema. He founded the National Research Council, the first chairman of which was Guglielmo Marconi ; he instituted the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (the after-work organization), the ex-officers' association, the Supreme Defence Council, he grouped together the various sporting activities, and finally created the Italian Academy. He followed the dramatic vicissitudes of the Nobile Polar Expedition with deep interest.

In the international field in 1928 he added to the series of international treaties ; with Ras Tafari of Abyssinia he concluded an Italo-Abyssinian pact of trade and friendship, an alliance with Albania, and under his auspices Italy adhered to the Briand-Kellogg Pact.

In the field of Constitutional affairs he grafted the Grand Council on to the Constitution, while he devoted particular care to agriculture and drafted the main lines of the great scheme for integral land reclamation which was in a few years to add many hundreds of thousands of hectares of arable land to Italy. Every day he conferred with the leaders of the Party, with the men at the head of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. He often reviewed the fighting services, addressed the officers, took part in the Army manoeuvres. Periodically he summoned the prefects, the chiefs of police, the podestàs of the larger cities, and the Fascist Party federal secretaries to report to him.

To those who grumbled about violations of the

Constitution he replied that Fascism actually aimed at effecting profound alterations in the Constitution to bring it into line with the times and the necessities of the new life of Italy, inasmuch as the Charter granted by King Charles Albert as far back as 1848 necessarily failed to consider certain essential factors of modern life, such as the syndicates as organs of public law, the corporations or guilds,¹ the colonies, and an infinite number of other elements. He reminded the fanatical devotees of the 'immortal principles' that Article 27 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man declares that 'all Constitutions are subject to revision because no generation has a right to subject future generations to its own laws.'

On December 9, of that year he bade farewell to the Chamber of Deputies which had reached its term of existence, describing it as the 'Fascist Constituent Assembly' on account of the many radical reforms which it had effected. He pointed out that, in spite of the spirit of Locarno and the 'sublime' Kellogg Pact, all States were now rearming. "When the storm is approaching it is then that people talk of peace and quiet," and he concluded: "We are going towards difficult times. The moment when we can sit down has not yet come and perhaps it never will come for us."

Finally, on the eve of the election of 1929, he summoned all the leading personalities of the country to what was called the Quinquennial Assembly of the Regime, not for a popular election speech, but to fix the point of the situation after a general look round the horizon. "Now," he said,

¹ It is interesting to remember that when the 1848 Constitution was being prepared there was a plan for basing it on the guilds, but it was abandoned as the guilds were then insufficiently developed.

"I have in my mind's eye our Italy in her geographical configuration, her history, her peoples : seas, mountains, rivers, cities, the country-side, the peoples. Follow me." He then proceeded to define what had been done in each of these various fields, in addition to the achievements already recorded, from the welfare work for the poor to the summer camps for the children of the people, from re-afforestation to agricultural credit, from the erection of new schools to the equipment of the ports and the creation of university centres, from collective labour contracts to the eight-hour law and all the mass of social legislation, from the electrification of the railways to the special motor roads, from the building of new aqueducts to the creation of catchment areas in the mountain districts, from the development of the navy and the merchant marine to that of aviation, from colonization in Libya to the construction of new sports grounds, from the enactment and enforcement of some thousand laws to the spiritual and physical improvement of the people.

On the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Fascist movement, Mussolini alluded to the coming election with the following words : 'Fascism, proud as it is of what it has achieved, has no intention of cadging for votes by flattering promises—it would rather reject them. . . . Let no one deceive himself into thinking that by a heap of ballot papers he can put an ephemeral mortgage on the developments of the Regime, which to-morrow will be more totalitarian than it is to-day. . . . He who does not accept this character of the electoral plebiscite, he who has no use for the rods and the axe of the Roman and Fascist Lictors' emblem, should quietly vote with the opposition herd.'

The election returned a huge majority in favour of the Regime, and the percentage of voters was far larger than it had ever been under the old Liberal system, when parties and factions struggled bitterly to drag the voters to the paper contest.

In his speech before the Quinquennial Assembly Mussolini set forth in detail the exhausting work he had had to do to govern the country. "Do not think that I am lacking in modesty when I tell you that all this work, of which I have given you a very short summary, has been conceived by my spirit. The work of legislation, and of the encouragement, control, and creation of new institutions has only been a part of my labours. There is another, less well known, but whose dimensions appear from the following figures, which may perhaps interest you : I have given 60,000 audiences, I have personally dealt with 1,887,112 individual cases brought to the attention of my private secretariat. Every time that individual citizens, even from the remotest villages, have applied to me they have received answers. To govern vigorously is not enough ; the people, even the people living farthest from the seats of power, the humblest, forgotten people, must be made to realize that the Government is composed of men who understand, give a helping hand and do not feel in the least detached from the rest of humanity. To sustain this effort I have placed my motor under strict regime, I have rationalized my daily work, reduced all dispersions of time and effort to a minimum and adopted this maxim which I recommend to all Italians : each day's work must be methodically but regularly disposed of in the day itself. There must be no arrears left over."

XVI

PEACE WITH THE CHURCH

ONE point of exceptional importance completes the picture of the achievements of this period—conciliation between Church and State. This was effected on February 11, 1929, with the unexpected conclusion of the Lateran Pacts, nearly sixty years after the beginning of the grave conflict which had divided Roman society into two hostile factions and had been embittered by the ceaseless intrigues of Freemasonry, often acting in the interests of foreign Powers and for over half a century had tormented the conscience of so many Italians.

The policy of conciliation proved a masterpiece of Mussolini's genius, his most astounding success which closed a phase of history and secured from the Holy See the recognition of Rome as the capital of the kingdom of Italy under the Savoy Monarchy, and created the new State of the Church by the delimitation of a territory known as the Vatican City. It realized the dreams of many laymen and ecclesiastics and conferred once more on Rome the functions which it had had only in the days of the Empire. The Roman Church, in agreeing to negotiate with the Government born of the Fascist Revolution, in spite of the traditional prudence of Vatican diplomacy, proved its intelligent confidence in the solidity of the Fascist Regime and in its continuance.

But this great event had been announced so unexpectedly as to violate many situations and deeply entrenched prejudices, that even many Fascists—those of narrower outlook—were more impressed than enthusiastic. Only later did they realize its immense value when a divergence of views which had arisen in connexion with the education of the young had been completely and easily settled through Mussolini's uncompromising vigour. Then the enemies both of Fascism and the Church remained confounded, while the well-meaning late-comers finally grasped the importance of an event so much greater than themselves. In this effort at understanding they were assisted by the words of the Duce himself, who both in the Chamber and in the Senate explained the higher motives of the policy of Conciliation. At the Quinquennial Assembly he had previously reminded his hearers that 'the Roman Empire is the historic antecedent first of Christianity, then of Catholicism,' that the agreements of February 11, had removed a thorn from the side of the nation and had been a milestone placed at the end of fifteen centuries of history. On May 14 the Chamber of Deputies examined all the antecedents of the question, showing unusual knowledge of history and diplomacy, revealing many unknown episodes, and narrating the vicissitudes of the negotiations initiated by him as far back as the autumn of 1926 when other graver problems were pressing and no one suspected that the negotiations had been begun; the matter was kept absolutely secret until the last moment. Indeed but for that secrecy it is very unlikely that the negotiations would have succeeded. But secrecy had obliged Mussolini to take upon himself the whole responsibility for the final decisions save for the explicit consent of the

King. "It was," Mussolini said, "one of those responsibilities 'che fan tremare le vene e i polsi di un uomo.'¹ A tremendous responsibility which not only solved the situation of the past, but even mortgaged the future. Nor could I ask anyone's advice ; my conscience alone could point out the path through protracted and laborious meditations. . . . But I believed and still believe that a revolution is a revolution only when it faces and solves the historic problems of people." He rendered full justice to the Pope's spirit of understanding, and pointed out significantly that, in spite of the international bearing of the agreement, it had been brought through without any intervention on the part of other Powers.

He developed the argument to the end on May 25 in the Senate, and convinced even those who had shown themselves incapable of appreciating the greatness of the event. Later, when the last conflict over the application of the Concordat had been settled, he put the seal on the accomplished fact by visiting His Holiness at the Vatican.

¹ Dante's *Inferno*, I, 90.

XVII

HARD TIMES

AT the end of 1929 the general situation underwent a sudden change which, if it did not cause Fascism to deviate from its course, nor its progress to be held up, nevertheless raised very serious obstacles in its path, due both to the hostility of those nations whose effective hegemony was based on the clauses of the Peace Treaties and to the spreading of the world economic depression which broke out in New York in the latter part of October. Hardly had domestic opposition been overcome when Fascism found itself up against a barrier of difficulties and aversions raised by the unfriendliness of the great plutocratic democracies and the consequences of the crisis on the capitalist system.

To all these negative forces pressing from outside Mussolini opposed a vigorous resistance built up in a spirit of sacrifice and discipline, in the compactness of the Italian people closely gathered around him, the fearless and reliable pilot of the ship which had been struck by the cyclone while sailing on its course. Unemployment and bankruptcies, the collapse of industrial, agricultural and commercial undertakings, the ruin of banks multiplied month by month and year by year. Many were the victims, some of whom were responsible, such as the shady business speculators, others perfectly innocent such as workers, farmers, and the men who had

carefully put by the savings of years ; but Italy weathered the storm without ever losing her capacity or determination to hold out.

During the month of May 1930 Mussolini spoke at Leghorn, Lucca, Florence, and Milan to denounce the evil intentions of certain Powers towards Italy who had been guilty of refusing to continue to remain subject to their influence. He repeated again and again that the situation promised the advent of difficult times. He said that whoever should dare to encroach on our independence and our future destinies " does not know to what a formidable fever-heat I should bring the whole Italian people. . . . The whole people, old men, infants, peasants, industrial workers, armed or unarmed, would become one human mass of humanity, indeed more than a mass, a thunderbolt which might be hurled against anyone and anywhere." It seemed to be a mysterious, untimely aggressive warning, and as such it was denounced abroad ; yet it was nothing more than the exact anticipation of what was to happen a few years later.

In the domestic field the corporative system proved an invaluable instrument for facing the general economic depression. On October 1 Mussolini addressed the National Council of Corporations, beginning with the assertion that " the Fascist State is either a corporative State or nothing at all." He issued a warning to those whom he called ' the general staff of Italian economy,' on the gravity of the crisis and the contraction of the State revenues, pointed out the constant intervention of the State to help those industries which were in danger of collapse when it was a case of safeguarding some collective interest, and expressed his confidence

that even this new and terribly hard ordeal would be overcome.

He had resigned from several Ministries, entrusting them to Fascist colleagues who had already had experience of public affairs. Later he suppressed the municipal octroi which constituted an absurd medieval survival and a hindrance to trade, and promoted the air cruises organized and led by Italo Balbo in the eastern Mediterranean and Latin America. He instructed Giuriati, the new Secretary of the Fascist Party who had succeeded Augusto Turati, to carry out a revision of the membership lists, so as to eliminate the undesirables who by hook or by crook had succeeded in penetrating into the Party's ranks. In view of the anti-Fascist reaction which was spreading over many parts of the world in 1930, he stated very definitely that "Fascism as an idea, a doctrine, a realization, is universal ; Italian in its particular institutions, it is universal in spirit. . . . It solves, in fact, the triple problem of relations between the State and the individual, between the State and the groups, and between organized groups." In that connexion he quoted the opinion of a foreign journalist as an accurate interpretation of the Fascism as a present and future reality : "The Peninsula is to-day a vast camp in which millions of men are silently training on land, on the sea, in the skies, in the schools, in the stadia, in the churches, for the great sacrifice of life, for the regeneration of the race, for the eternal Latin spirit, for the great battle which will take place to-morrow or never. We hear a rumbling sound as of an immense legion on the march."

XVIII

BEREAVEMENTS

FOR some time past Mussolini's family had joined its head in Rome, and they were all living together in his private residence at Villa Torlonia. Vittorio and Bruno, who were still boys, attended the ordinary public schools. Edda, his beloved eldest born, had married the young diplomat, Galeazzo Ciano, son of Admiral Costanzo Ciano, Count of Cortellazzo, the war hero, decorated with a gold medal for valour and Minister of Communications (later President of the Chamber) ; Romano and Anna Maria had been born later. The Duce kept in close touch with his brother Arnaldo who, as editor of the *Popolo d'Italia*, had proved himself a vigorous journalist of the Revolution and a confidential and invaluable collaborator.

One sad day in August 1930 death removed Sandrino, Arnaldo's adored eldest son, who died in his twentieth year on the Adriatic coast after the alternating vicissitudes of a grave illness. His uncle the Duce had hastened from Rome to see his nephew and give him some encouragement in the imminence of his death, and returned once more to Romagna for the funeral, which was held amid the deep sorrow of the local population. The loss of his fine, promising boy, endowed with unusual moral and intellectual qualities, broke the heart of Arnaldo, whom the affectionate attentions of his

brother failed to console. Arnaldo wished to honour the memory of his son by charitable works, and while he was trying to resume his activities and to distract himself by a journey to Africa, the thought of his dead boy inspired some fine writing—a beautiful elegy ending with moving invocation to the Deity. Arnaldo sent a few copies printed to his intimates, and Benito Mussolini actually shed tears on reading it.

On December 21, 1931, Arnaldo, worn out with sorrow, suddenly died in Milan, leaving a moving spiritual testament to the Italian people. Neither men nor political or economic vicissitudes showed themselves hostile, but fate itself had stricken Mussolini depriving him of his brother. Arnaldo was buried in Romagna by the side of his son on the Paderno hill, because, as he had written in his will, up there ‘I shall feel that I am living for ever with the people of my own land, and overlooking the valley where my hopes once flourished.’

The Duce, in the loneliness of his bereavement, wished to honour his brother’s memory in a manner calculated to record his activity. He at once jotted down a few pages containing remembrances of his childhood passed with his brother; they begin with some passages full of deep sorrow: ‘This evening, December 25, 1931, Fascist Era Year X, one the saddest Christmases, perhaps the very saddest, of my whole life, I wish to write the first pages of the book dedicated to the memory of Arnaldo.’ Later on he writes: ‘For his death I have sorrowed and shall sorrow for long; like the mutilations of the body, those of the soul are irreparable.’ They are the same words which Mussolini the Bersagliere had written after the death of his mother. ‘I feel sorrow for the death of my brother as if it were a secret

fire which is ever within me, a fire which inspires my will and my faith. I shall bear the burden even for him, lest all his travail, his passion, his suffering should be dissipated, so that his memory may be honoured, the ideals in which he believed triumph and last, even and indeed above all beyond my own life. . . . A political man may feel doubts about his most faithful collaborator, he may see himself repudiated by his own son ; but his brother he can rely upon, and Arnaldo was the one soul to which I could sometimes anchor my own and find a few moments of fleeting quiet. They were the moments when, bending over the tomb of our mother at San Cassiano, or gathered together on my birthday, or mounting on to the Rocca delle Caminate to gaze down from on high on the spots where we had spent the best times of our adolescence, we looked into each other's eyes in silence, thinking of that innocent and happy time which bore in its womb our hard destiny.'

On account of that sorrow the Italian people came yet closer to their Duce who had been stricken in his human affections and felt his essential goodness of heart through his interpretation of his brother's goodness when he wrote : 'He was a good man indeed. This virtue of goodness was inborn in him. By good I do not mean weak, because goodness can harmonize perfectly with the greatest strength of mind, with the most rigid execution of one's duty. Goodness is not only a question of temperament, but of education. In a man's later years it is the result of an outlook on the world, an outlook wherein the elements of optimism are stronger than those of pessimism, because goodness cannot be sceptical, it must have faith. Arnaldo was thus drawn towards goodness by these three considerations,

and not by political calculations or by a desire for popularity.'

' In the exercise of his goodness he was extremely reserved. He shrank from publicity. He begged, especially in these last times, that everything should be carried out in silence. Only now, from the letters which I have received, do I realize the great extent of this kindly activity, which was not only of a material nature. A newspaper is like the shores of the sea on which all those who are thrown up by the stormy waves, all those for whom life has been a never solved problem or suffering which has never found appeasement come for refuge. One may be "good" by giving a subsidy, by trying to secure a job, by finding lodgings for someone, or even by saying a kind word or administering a severe reproof. To be good means to do good without blowing one's own trumpet and without any hope of reward, even of a divine one. To remain "good" all one's life, in spite of everything, that is to say, in spite of the deceptions practised by crooks on one's good faith, in spite of ingratitude and forgetfulness, in spite of the cynicism of the professional man, that is the summit of perfection which few attain and on which very few indeed remain ! The "good" man does not ask himself if it is worth while. He feels that it is always worth while. To help an unfortunate even if he be unworthy, to dry a tear even an impure one, to give relief to unhappiness, hope to sadness, consolation in death, all this means to consider oneself not detached from humanity, but being a part of it, in flesh and blood ; it means weaving the web of sympathy with invisible but potent threads, which enmesh the spirit and make it better. To the practice of this virtue Arnaldo devoted his whole self after the death of Sandrino.

He then had but one thought and one programme : to do good deeds to honour the memory of his son, to do good to all, to friends, to the indifferent, even to enemies—not his personal enemies, for perhaps he had none, but the enemies of our epoch and our triumph. Although it was very far from his intentions, there is no doubt this conduct of his was beneficial also to Fascism.’

XIX

GOING TOWARDS THE PEOPLE

MEN of high character, comrades in battle and in faith, such as Michele Bianchi and Enrico Corradini, had lately passed away ; the Duke of Aosta was dead, the commander of the Third Army in the War, a fervent admirer of Mussolini and supporter of Fascism. Their high spiritual inheritance inspired the nation in that gravely critical period.

The Duce then set himself to the task of extending a helping hand to those afflicted by unemployment, and while he pushed ahead with the great enterprise of land reclamation he appropriated milliards of lira for public works on the principle of employing workers on undertakings which would certainly become paying propositions rather than frittering away the money of the State in wasteful doles. He set up the various welfare institutions whereby the Party provided for the needs of the poorest, and in another field he created the 'Istituto mobiliare italiano,' and later the 'Istituto per la Ricostruzione industriale' to help the sound economic forces of the country emerge from the slough of the depression.

In October 1931, in a speech at Naples, Mussolini laid down the main lines of Italian policy, based on a spirit of justice which was easily understood and accepted by the Italian nation, but were rejected by the blind egoism of the Powers whom Italy had helped to win the War. On the Piazza del Plebiscito,

where he had spoken nine years before on the eve of the March on Rome, he said : " In domestic policy the word of command is to go definitely towards the people." In the international field he warned his audience that it was inconceivable that another sixty years should have to elapse " before the word *finis* be written to the tragic accountancy of debits and credits born of the life-blood of ten million young men who will never again see the light of day." He maintained the necessity for an equalization of armaments and for the revision of those treaties which constituted a protocol ' dictated by revenge, rancour, and fear.'

In subsequent years Mussolini again insisted on the necessity for cancelling war debts and for granting Germany equality of rights. But those who had so greatly benefited by Versailles remained ever deaf to his words of justice, until Germany herself was forced to take matters into her own hands to secure adequate recognition of her rights.

He also warned the world of the danger of too many international conferences which not only concluded nothing, but made the situation ever more confused and dangerous. In October 1932, he reported in Turin that the Regime was taking up the question of the condition of the workers suffering from the effects of the depression ; but he was not anxious about its possible political consequences because he felt more than ever confident in his own powers. It was then that he first raised the idea of a Pact between the four great civilized Powers of Europe to ensure peace.

The tenth anniversary of the Fascist Regime was approaching. While the economic and even the international political problems were becoming ever graver and more complicated, Fascism set out

to complete the corporative cadres of the nation, elaborated its doctrine and prepared the Exhibition of the Revolution, designed to present the facts and the spirit of Italy's historic vicissitudes since the War, in order to show the world the realities of the new system. In June 1932 the volume of the new Italian Encyclopædia containing the article on 'Fascism' appeared; Mussolini himself drafted the section concerning the doctrine, summing up the political, ethical, and social bases of the movement and showing its universal application.

In October of that same year the Duce addressed the local leaders gathered in Piazza Venezia, thereby inaugurating a series of celebrations for the tenth anniversary. He said to them: "I am your chief, and I am, as always, ready to assume all responsibilities." With reference to the still grave economic situation, he set forth for the first time the following dilemma: "Either this is a cyclical crisis 'in' the system and it will be solved; or it is a crisis 'of' the system, and then we shall be face to face with the transition from one epoch of civilization to another." He insisted on the necessity of giving place to the young. "No one is older than he who is jealous of youth." In Milan he pointed out that the Italian people was now the protagonist in its own history, adding that the twentieth century would be the century of Fascism, the century when Italy for the third time would come once more to lead human civilization. He also announced an amnesty. Finally, he inaugurated the new road which he himself had planned between the Altar of the Fatherland on the Monument to Victor Emmanuel in the Piazza Venezia and the Colosseum, and named it the Via dell'Impero, not as a mere piece of rhetoric, recalling

the Rome of the Cæsars which had its fora in that area, but in allusion to Italy's future empire. Along that road he had statues of Cæsar, of Augustus, and of the other greater Roman emperors erected. In the meanwhile a new special motor road had been built between Rome and the sea at Ostia, and in the Farnesina quarter the Foro Mussolini arose, for the physical education of young Fascists.¹

The great celebrations of the tenth anniversary made many foreigners wonder what the new Italy really was. The world was considerably surprised and indeed astonished, almost as though it had been asleep during the past years and had noticed nothing. There were many expressions of appreciation from foreign quarters, although the hostility of certain Powers was not thereby attenuated; indeed, in some cases it was accentuated inasmuch as this new Italy appeared more formidable than before and consequently dangerous. France strengthened her ties with the Little Entente and seemed gratified at every sign of Yugoslav unfriendliness towards Italy.

Nevertheless, the policy of the Regime had been wholly inspired throughout the past ten years by a sense of European co-operation, while in the interior of the country it had been engaged on the beneficial and peaceful task of reclaiming the 'never-ending fen' of the Pontine Marshes, of which the watchword was 'This is the kind of war which we prefer,' pronounced by Mussolini at the end of 1932 at the inauguration of Littoria, the first town built in the reclaimed area, now the capital of the province. From that day he fixed the dates for the inauguration of the other towns to be founded in the same district—Saubaudia, Pontinia,

¹ It is an academy for training teachers of physical education and a sports ground for all kinds of sport.

Aprilia, and Pomezia, names of good Roman and rural sound. During the following years yet other new towns were to arise in various agricultural, industrial, mining, or military centres, such as Mussolinia, Fertilia, Arsia,¹ Carbonia,² Guidonia,³ Marghera, Aquilinia, Ilvania, Volania, and the many rural villages scattered about Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, named after the heroes of the War and the revolution.

In the course of the summer the Duce paid repeated visits to the Pontine area to register the progress made and to thresh the first wheat produced in it, amid the noise of the machinery hidden in the yellow dust of the stubble. The farmers, who had come from all parts of Italy where the agricultural population was most numerous, faced the risks of land reclamation, as malaria had not yet been eliminated ; they gathered round the great Romagnol worker, proud and happy of having him among themselves, a participant in the same toil, and dubbed him the first *contadino* of Italy. One day, amid the applause and acclamations, a peculiarly significant cry was heard from that rustic crowd : " You are all of us."

Hydro-electric catchment areas were being constructed, the new Rome-Naples short line was being built, the electrification of many lines proceeding apace, the great Apulian aqueduct, begun decades ago, at last being brought to completion, while others were built in other provinces, town planning was carried out in many cities large and small, the Capitol of Rome isolated. For many a long year these public works had been demanded in vain at a time when party squabbles dominated the country ; Mussolini now added the special

¹ In the Istrian coal area.

² A Sardinian coal-mines centre.

³ The air force city near Tivoli.

motor-lorry road to handle the traffic between Genoa and the Po valley.

The Franco-Italian naval agreement concluded a short while previously had broken down because the anti-Italian elements in France refused to accept the principle of parity already established in Washington in 1922. The United States continued to reject, as far as concerned themselves, the cancellation of war debts, while the economic depression continued unabated everywhere. The beneficiaries of Versailles insisted on refusing to Germany all the rights already recognized in principle; in 1932 the first phase of the disarmament conference had come to an end without any result; Japan withdrew from the League of Nations after that organization had vainly attempted to intervene in the Chinese-Japanese conflict; on every sector of the horizon appeared conflicts and the seeds of war. Peace was again in danger, although barely twenty years had elapsed since the outbreak of the World War.

Mussolini felt the urgent need for assuring peace, and throughout the Year XI¹ of the Regime he devoted himself to a generous, tenacious effort in this sense, ever handicapped by the lack of understanding or jealousy or open hostility of others. His action, more effective than that of any other head of a government at that time, was not limited to the warnings issued through many articles published in the *Popolo d'Italia* and sundry foreign papers, but found expression in proposals for international agreements culminating in the above-mentioned principle of a pact between Italy, Great Britain, France, and Germany.

¹ While the ordinary Christian year is maintained, the Fascist era is added in Roman numerals, dating from October 28, 1922.

The new National Socialist Germany of Hitler adhered to the Duce's initiative conceived to avert the formation of hostile *blocs* in Europe, to favour agreements between the great Powers even in the subject of treaty revision, and to guarantee equal rights for Germany should the disarmament conference definitely break down. The Duce had drawn up the pact in detail in the quiet retreat of La Rocca della Caminate before submitting the plan to the British Ministers MacDonald and Sir John Simon on their visit to Rome.

But the first idea had matured in his mind the previous year, and he had set it forth in a speech at Turin. After varying vicissitudes the Pact was concluded on June 7, 1933, and raised great hopes. On communicating it to the Senate Mussolini appealed to all the Governments concerned in act in such a manner 'as to allow not only the hopes, but the certainty of the peoples to pass through the luminous gap now opened, while the clouds gather menacingly on the horizon.'

That happy interlude was all too brief. Soon new shadows, new conflicts, new uncertainties emerged to confuse the situation once more. The disarmament conference, again summoned at Geneva, failed definitely, and then Germany left the League of Nations. Mussolini, who had already warned the world of the necessity of abandoning the system of conferences which were over-crowded, too frequent, and regulated by the inconclusive Parliamentary procedure, affirmed that the failure of this attempt at disarmament would end in the failure of the League of Nations itself. 'New groupings of States will be formed, conflicts between them will become immediately acute, and a time of terrible uncertainties even in the social

field will commence in the history of Europe and the world.'

One phase had ended owing to the lack of understanding and good-will on the part of the victorious Powers ; it was evident that preparations must be made for another phase. Here are the Duce's first warnings to the Italian people : during the army manoeuvres in the Langhe district, in which he took part together with the King, often marching at the head of the units, he said to the people of Cuneo : " We must be strong." Then he entrusted to 20,000 men decorated for gallantry in the field the duty of reasserting Italy's primacy " on land, on the sea, in the air, in material things, in the spirit." He again took charge of the military Ministries, devoting the most careful attention to the problems connected with them, and then began to examine the political and military relations between Eritrea, Somaliland, and Ethiopia as it was then under the Negus Haile Selassieh, who delayed applying the clauses of a definite agreement concluded several years previously with Italy.

There followed a period of confusion and uncertainty, whence as from a nebula differentiated orientations and guiding principles, indeed opposing groups, were afterwards to emerge. Mussolini's efforts for peace were so transparently honest and tenacious that, in spite of everything, he continued to keep Italy in the League of Nations and made proposals for its reformation in order to save it.

But when rearmament began to appear irresistible and general, he took measures to prevent Italy from dropping below the level of other countries.

In June 1934 he met Hitler at Stra and Venice ; then when in Austria's internal disturbances it appeared that the whole of that country rejected the

'Anschluss' with Germany, he sent troops to the Brenner to avert acts of violence and frontier incidents, concluded agreements with Austria herself and with Hungary, which were always, however, inspired by considerations of a possible general collaboration provided it would promote a peaceful revision of the Versailles Treaties. On the other hand France and the countries associated with her systematically rejected these guiding principles which alone were capable of ensuring peace.

While awaiting the development of events abroad, Mussolini consolidated the corporate system, as an introduction to the future reform of the Constitution. He set up the twenty-two Corporations or guilds and put them to work to prove their practical efficiency. The spirit of the new system, its method, and its inner logic were defined by the Duce in a number of speeches delivered on November 14, 1933, January 13 and November 10, 1934, and also in an address to the workers of Milan on October 6, 1934. He maintained that economic Liberalism had failed, and examined the history of the system, now in such a critical condition, without rejecting its merits and its usefulness in the previous century. He explained how trusts and cartels are indications of the involution of Liberal economy, because they had practically suppressed free competition and resorted to State protection. Super-capitalism has also killed political Liberalism. The corporative system, considering this phenomenon in its practical aspects, rouses against it a disciplined and controlled economy, without thereby repudiating the importance of property and of private enterprise which are subordinated to the supreme national interest alone.

Corporativism stands above both Capitalism and

Socialism, which have both broken down at the same time, but it inherits their vital elements ; it rejects the abstract figure of the 'economic man,' reaffirms the reality of man in his entirety, and tackles the vast social problem in all its phases. The coming into effect of the corporative system presupposes, however, a single political party, a totalitarian State and a very high ideal tension, such indeed as that of the Fascist era wherein, after victory in war 'institutions are renovated, the land is reclaimed, cities are founded.' The system is also a form of self-discipline on the part of the producing classes, with the intervention of the State whenever agreement between the parties to the dispute is not achieved. Its ultimate object is the enforcement of a higher social justice calculated to shorten the distance between the maximum and the minimum or non-existent possibilities of mankind. It tends towards the principle that men are equal not only before the law, as the French Revolution asserted, but also equals before work ; work, that is, considered as a right and as a duty. In the interests of the individual and of production corporative system tends to control, harmonize economic life, and to develop its possibilities to the utmost.

If the past century was identified with the power of capitalism, the present Fascist century will be identified with that of work and must solve the problem of distribution of wealth and eliminate the tragic phenomenon of poverty and unemployment in the midst of abundance.

There are indeed no differences between the guiding principles of this great Fascist reform and the ideas of the youthful Mussolini.

XX

ITALY AGAINST THE WORLD

WHEN the Duce summoned the leaders of the Regime to the second Quinquennial Assembly which preceded the election of March 1934, the Revolution had transformed the country and permeated every sector of the nation's life, creating a new harmony of forces and organisms. The international situation, on the other hand, had reached a maximum of instability in consequence of the breakdown of the unstable balance of Versailles. The economic depression had expanded and become intensified into a general political crisis. Decisive events were therefore to be expected in that same crucial year which Mussolini had long ago defined and predicted.

He had noted in the first place that since the previous Quinquennial Assembly Fascism, from being a purely Italian phenomenon, had become universal. "In the Fascist system," he said, "the people are the body of the State and the State is the spirit of the people." He then insisted on the necessity of being strong on the sea, which surrounds us so that Italy may be regarded as an island, an island of farmers and seamen, who must increase in numbers, inasmuch as wealth is born of the multiplication of life and not of the multiplication of death. In this connexion he quoted a passage from Machiavelli and one from Pietro Verri:

'They who plan that a city shall become a great empire,' wrote Machiavelli, 'must with every effort exert themselves to make it full of inhabitants, because without this abundance of men a city will never become great.' The quotation from Verri reads: 'Population is one of the elements of national wealth, it constitutes the real and physical force of the State, inasmuch as the number of its inhabitants is the only measure of its power.' Finally, he laid down the marching orders for Italy's expansion in Africa and Asia, to the south and the east.

On August 25, 1934, at the end of the army manoeuvres which took place in the central Apennines, Mussolini addressed the members of the Cabinet, the Field-M Marshals, generals, and officers from a tank, setting forth what he regarded as the new phase of the Fascist era, the phase in which Italy was to develop a definite policy of expansion, now that she had shaken off the artificial ties of the League of Nations which were only advantageous to the hegemonic Powers as enabling them to handicap the development of other nations which had been sacrificed by the Peace treaties. The selfishness of those Powers had frustrated all attempts at peaceful conciliation, and equitable treaty revision and had forced Italy and Germany to play their own hand. The future had therefore to be provided for and military strength increased. Mussolini warned his hearers that "we must be prepared for war not to-morrow, but to-day. . . . Let me remind you that the fighting services represent the essential element in the hierarchy of nations." In October 1934, addressing the Florentine Fascists, he repeated his slogan 'To believe, to obey, to fight,' and then, inaugurating the new province of Littoria

in the reclaimed Pontine area, he told the farmers that "it is the plough which drives the furrow, but it is the sword which defends it."

The time to act had now come. In Eritrea, in Somaliland, at Gondar, and Wal-Wal serious incidents had been provoked by the ever-increasing arrogance of the Abyssinian rasses against the Italian representatives and garrisons. It was necessary to react in good time, if possible with a guarantee of freedom of action as far as concerned the other European Powers ; hence the agreement concluded with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Laval, in January 1935, and the subsequent Franco-Italo-British meeting at Stresa. But to the French journalists who had come to Rome with M. Laval, Mussolini made the following significant statement : "The crucial year opens under the propitious auspices of the Franco-Italian agreements. Let us work intelligently and with perseverance so that it may give us what the world expects. . . . We must not believe that everything has been done, and that nothing more remains to be done. No. Friendship must be continuously cultivated in order that it may synchronize with the natural development of peoples and of their interests." These words show that he evidently foresaw already the difficulties which were to arise in future, but they were words which France of the *Front populaire* chose to ignore.

The life of nations is nothing but a succession of contrasts between divers forces which meet each other, and either co-operate with or eliminate each other, without pause, just as in the atmosphere the hours of sunshine alternate with those of storm. But whereas the forces of nature follow certain immutable physical laws, those of humanity vary

according to spiritual influences, especially those of their chiefs, more or less according as their rulers are men of mediocre attainments or iron-willed leaders.

Mussolini is a leader. Hitler defined him as "one of those solitary men who are not protagonists" in history, but who make history themselves. He had set himself the task of leading the Italian people towards higher destinies, declaring from time to time the goals which he aimed at. We need but re-read his writings and speeches to realize how he had clearly predicted, years ahead, the World War, the Fascist Revolution, and the conquest of the Empire. He always takes the initiative himself, and does not submit to that of others; his every act is a phase of an organic plan always thought out, and always carried into effect at the proper time. With a keenly realistic sense he measures possibilities and slows down or speeds up action according to circumstances, taking advantage even of the obstacles and conditions of the moment which may seem most adverse.

After the March on Rome his general policy was to exploit the forces of the nation, with a tenacious action penetrating in depth, in order to secure for his people everything to which its capacities and sacrifices entitled it. As the aversion and fears of the satisfied Powers prevented their adherence to the Duce's peaceful efforts to secure an equality of conditions among the various peoples in harmony with that social justice which had been effected within his own country, when every further attempt appeared useless, he felt obliged to resort to direct action, thus inaugurating a new period of history. He systematically prepared the Ethiopian enterprise, mobilized several divisions of the army,

enrolled tens of thousands of Blackshirt volunteers, and energetically faced the diplomatic opposition which was at once pressed forward by those very Imperialist Powers which for centuries and by every possible means had seized colonies in every continent.

The serious work of military preparation and of supply and transport, in addition to the permanent cares of government, did not prevent Mussolini from personally conducting a sharp diplomatic contest or from bringing the spirit of the nation to a veritable concert pitch of enthusiasm. The allusion contained in his speech to the Quinquennial Assembly gradually took shape. On March 23, 1935, Mussolini said to the Fascists gathered together: "We are ready for any task which fate may impose on us, and if necessary we shall overcome with irresistible impetus all the obstacles which might be placed in our path." On May 14, after Stresa, while a formal conciliation procedure between Italy and Ethiopia was being attempted and Franco-British opposition was becoming ever more accentuated, he said in the Senate that Italy wished to have her rear safe, stating that "no Power can take upon itself the intolerable licence of interfering with the nature and extent of our precautionary measures." On May 25 he added in the Chamber: "Let everyone realize very definitely that when it is a question of the security of our territory and the life of our soldiers we are ready to assume all responsibilities, even the supreme ones." Certainly no one can accuse Mussolini of having concealed his intentions.

The youthful British Minister for League Affairs, Anthony Eden, however, failed to grasp the meaning of these words and had the presumption to try

to intervene directly by a false move which only served to embitter the dispute. On June 8 Mussolini flew to Cagliari to greet the troops of the Sabauda division, about to sail for East Africa, and said : " We have both old and new accounts to settle up ; we shall settle them. We shall not pay the slightest attention to what may be said on the other side of our frontiers . . . we shall imitate to the letter those who are trying to teach us a lesson." On July 6 at Eboli he more or less repeated these words in addressing the Blackshirts on the eve of sailing : " We are engaged in a struggle of decisive importance and are irrevocably determined to see it through to the very end." In an article published in the *Popolo d'Italia* of July 31 he flatly told the League members who protected the Abyssinian slave-owners that ' the problem admits of but one solution—with Geneva, without Geneva, against Geneva.' On August 20 he ordered the Blackshirts of the ' 28th of October ' division, who were afterwards so greatly to distinguish themselves at the battle of Tembien, " to march ahead, overcoming all obstacles until you have attained the goal marked out for you."

The situation was now hurrying on to a solution, in Africa as in Europe. The League of Nations, incapable of handicapping Italy with its hypocritical procedure, was threatening sanctions which it had not even applied in the case of Japan. Mussolini then summoned a Cabinet Council at Bolzano during the army manœuvres, and warned the public that Italy was ready to face an economic siege like any other act of force ; on September 8, from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, he reassured the enthusiastic and impatient youths who were acclaiming him with three words : " Noi tireremo diritto " (We shall drive ahead).

Ethiopia's default and her anti-Italian attitude were obvious and proven by overwhelming documentary evidence ; there were also British-Italian agreements recognizing Italy's definite rights in the Empire of the Negus, and the incidents provoked by the Abyssinians on the borders of Somaliland and Eritrea were not open to doubt. Nevertheless, the League of Nations, under the pressure of the British Government, was openly hostile to Italy's claims ; these were set forth in a full and carefully drafted memorandum which was not even taken into consideration. Mr. Eden encouraged the Negus to refuse any satisfaction to Italy. A united front against Italy was thus being formed in Europe and in Africa, based on the hostility of the barbarous Amharas, on the jealousy of certain groups in Great Britain and on the political and ideological aversion for Fascism of various sects and regimes. There were but two choices for Italy—either to capitulate at once or undertake direct action independently of the League's procedure.

Mussolini measured the gravity of the action he was about to embark on, with all its enormous political, economic, and military risks. But without hesitation he decided to undertake the serious responsibility which would place Italy, thirteen years after the March on Rome, against the world in a situation unexampled in any other country. The decision taken in cold blood in these circumstances gives us the measure of Mussolini's force of character.

At the end of the rainy season on the Ethiopian tableland operations were to be commenced to settle up old accounts left open since Adowa. For some days it had been known that the Duce was going to speak from Palazzo Venezia and on the wireless

to the people summoned to all the open spaces of Italy by siren, drum, trumpet and bell. This happened on October 2, 1935, and was an event without precedent, an unparalleled spectacle of national solidarity. The Italians of the cities, of the villages, of the mountains, of the valleys, of the plains, and those sailing on ships at sea or living in the remotest parts of the world gathered round the loud-speakers, while all Rome was in Piazza Venezia in the presence of the Duce who appeared on the balcony at sundown to announce the fiery ordeal the nation was to undergo and the civic resistance he expected of it. With his powerful impassioned voice he made the epoch-making announcement, appealing to the reawakened spirit of the descendants of ancient Rome. "A solemn hour," he said, "is about to strike in the history of Italy. For many months the wheel of fate, under the impulse of steady determination, has been revolving towards the goal ; at this hour its rhythm is faster and now nothing can stop it. . . . We have waited patiently for thirteen years during which the circle of selfish Powers has been closing ever more tightly around us, stifling our vitality. With Ethiopia we have had patience for forty years. But now it is enough ! . . . Let no country think it can bend us without first having fought very hard indeed. . . . Italy ; proletarian and Fascist Italy, Italy of Vittorio Veneto, and the Fascist Revolution, arise ! "

General De Bono, formerly member of the Fascist Quadrumvirate, and now Commander-in-Chief of the Italian forces in East Africa, received orders to cross the river Mareb, then constituting the border between Eritrea and Abyssinia, with his troops, and in a few days Adigrat, Adowa, where General

Baratieri had been defeated in 1896, Axum, the holy city of the Copts, and Makalleh, which had been so heroically defended in the last African campaign, were occupied. Thus Major Galliano, Generals Arimondi, and Da Bormida and their gallant battalions were at last avenged.

On November 18, the European coalition conspiring at Geneva initiated the monstrous unforgettable crime of economic sanctions against Italy ; it was a veritable siege calculated to strangle the nation and starve it into submission for lack of raw materials and of gold and through the closing of all doors to its exports. The Italians took up the challenge, rigidly determined to resist at all costs : they celebrated this attempted assassination of a whole nation by raising the Tricolor on every house in town and country. The King himself, in one of his very rare public utterances, set forth Italy's claims while addressing the delegates at the dedication of the new university city in Rome.

Day by day, while ever fresh successes followed each other on the African fronts, while the fifty-two sanctionist States threatened Italy with ever fresh pains and penalties for having dared to defy them, the British fleet in the Mediterranean was greatly strengthened in the hope of bringing Italy to her knees, the Italian people reacted with virile dash and an almost mystical devotion. If Geneva deprived Italy of supplies of the first necessity, threatened an embargo on oil, and the closing of the Suez Canal, and prevented Italians from exporting their products abroad, if the British Government fortified its Mediterranean bases and concluded naval agreements with other Mediterranean Powers, Italy replied by counter-sanctions, and as a strategic measure reinforced the garrisons.

in Libya on the borders of Egypt, while the women of Italy, followed the example of the Queen who offered her gold wedding ring and that of the King to the Treasury in the truly Roman ceremony of the *giornata della fede*.¹ The whole people made gifts of gold and silver and of iron which could be melted down and turned into munitions. Many Italians who had been decorated during the War by foreign countries, which had now joined the sanctionist plot, returned their decorations.

In the meanwhile the veterans of the Libyan campaign, the Carso, the Piave, and the March on Rome, together with the younger men of the Fascist generation hastened to volunteer for service in East Africa. Even those who still bore traces of the wounds suffered in previous wars, and Italians resident abroad flocked to the colours. The points of danger were competed for, invalids subjected themselves to surgical operations so as to pass the test, and many officers renounced their commissions to serve in the ranks. Youthful Avanguardisti (boys from fourteen to eighteen) and even Balilla fled from home to follow their elder brothers beyond the seas to the wild mountain fastnesses of Ethiopia. Airmen and seamen offered themselves for enterprises involving certain death for the national cause. the Duce's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, his sons Vittorio and Bruno, and his nephew took part in the campaign as airmen.

The world was astounded at Mussolini's challenge to Britain's naval power, and the enthusiasm of the people reached a white heat in the face of the sanctionist experiment.

¹ The *fedi* (wedding-rings) were handed in and melted down to increase the State's gold reserve, and replaced with steel rings. The value of the gold thus collected together with innumerable other gold ornaments, ran into ten figures.

When Mussolini was abroad as an emigrant earning his livelihood by manual labour and journalism and preaching the necessity for revolution, he was alone with himself, as in the weary days of his imprisonment for political offences. When he left the Socialist Party to throw himself into the fray in favour of intervention he was still alone, confident in his destiny, amid innumerable enemies, but already surrounded by a handful of faithful comrades ; when the ' Aventine ' was raging and tearing and seeking whom it might devour, he alone decided on patient resistance when abandoned by the pusillanimous and legions of Blackshirts in the provinces impatiently awaited his sign for a violent reaction. During the Ethiopian war and the sanctions again he was the one and only maker of his own and Italy's destiny in the face of the world, but then he had around him the frenzied devotion of the whole Italian people. Thus the leader who leads has scaled the steps of his ascent through his own personal autonomous and lonely merit, but time after time he has appeared ever more the interpreter of the passionate feelings of all that was best in Italy and has finally become the chief of a whole nation rising against the arrogant opposition of innumerable enemies banded together in a conspiracy. This is Mussolini's political ' career.'

The other peoples opposed, like Italy, by the league of conservative egoism, came to our side on account of the identity of their interests and ideals with ours ; above all Germany, who had reconstituted her army thereby commencing the break up of the Versailles Treaty, refused to participate in sanctions, and in May 1936, denounced the Locarno Pact in answer to the conclusion of the Franco-

Soviet Pact and rearmed the demilitarized zone along the Rhine.

Sir Samuel Hoare and M. Laval tried to work out a compromise solution of the Ethiopian conflict which was not followed up because the more embittered sanctioneers prevailed, and on account of their excessive hostility to Italy averted the grave danger of an imperfect and incomplete settlement. Immediately afterwards the Duce, addressing the farmers in the reclaimed Pontine area at Pontinia, declared that "a nation of 44 millions not only of inhabitants but of souls, is not going to let itself be strangled with impunity, and still less swindled."

He presided in person at the conferences on the military operations, having realized by intuition, in spite of the predictions of the strategists and the opinions of the experts, that to carry through the campaign quickly it was necessary to disregard all considerations inspiring colonial wars of a normal character. "I proposed," he afterwards said, "to conduct the war in East Africa as if it were a continental war, and I ordered my collaborators to do so." It seemed a dangerous subversion of methods, but the facts justified the Duce, and the war was concluded in only seven months with a complete victory secured on two fronts by Marshals Badoglio¹ and Graziani.

Thus, on May 5, Mussolini was able to announce to the people gathered once more in the Piazza Venezia, the lightning-like conquest of Addis Ababa and the restoration of peace. The East African enterprise really came to its culmination on the fateful night of May 9, after two short meetings of the Grand Council and of the Council of Ministers

¹ Badoglio succeeded De Bono at the end of 1935 on the northern front, while Graziani remained in command on the southern front throughout the campaign.

which decided the foundation of the Empire, while the people congregated on all the *piazze* of Italy were impatiently awaiting the announcement.

In Rome the Palazzo Venezia, flood-lit by the reflectors, stood out above the surging crowds. The brilliant lights made the helmets and bayonets of the troops drawn up on the white steps of the Altar of the Fatherland glitter brightly. The roar of the masses of people pouring into the Piazza from all the adjoining streets ceased at the first words of the Duce as he appeared on the balcony. "All the knots have been cut by our shining sword, and the African victory remains in the history of Italy complete and pure as the Legionaries who have fallen and as those who have survived dreamed of it and wished it to be. . . . Raise up, on high, Legionaries, your ensigns, your swords, and your hearts, to greet after fifteen centuries on these fateful hills of Rome the reappearance of the Empire."

In the sudden silence the powerful voice of the Duce rang out on the Fora of the Cæsars, beyond the mountains and beyond the seas, and his words remained graven on the anxiously waiting spirits, penetrated into time and into the depths of the starlit sky.

The King, who had now become Emperor, conferred the insignia of Knight Grand Cross of the Military Order of Savoy on Benito Mussolini, motivated as follows: "As Minister of the Armed Forces, he prepared, conducted, and won the greatest colonial war ever recorded in history, a war which he, as Head of the King's Government, foresaw and willed for the sake of the prestige, the life, and the greatness of the Fascist fatherland."

But the great ordeal was not yet over. The war having been won, there yet remained to win the

peace. If Geneva had at once forgotten its grudge against the designated victim which had refused to be strangled, peace would have achieved a definite triumph. Instead all the forces hostile to Italy, from the French *Front populaire* to international Jewry, from Freemasonry to plutocracy, from Bolshevism to Anglo-Saxon Puritanism, maintained, indeed intensified, their aversion for Italy and backed Geneva, refusing to recognize the new order of things. The fugitive Tafari was received at the League of Nations as if he represented a real live member State, and was even invited to the Coronation of King George VI of England. Only Germany and a few other friendly States immediately recognized Italy's new Empire, and only on July 15, 1936, did the League, owing to the force of economic pressure, lift sanctions. On that day Mussolini before applauding Romans, established as a fact the defeat of the second adversary: "On the battlements of world sanctionism the white flag has been raised."

During the two months which had elapsed since the occupation of Addis Ababa the Duce had already created the organic bases of the new domain. He traced out the road network of the Empire, the first condition for colonization, a vast enterprise which was almost completed two years later in spite of the inevitable suspension of work during the rainy season. He set up the administrative organization of the colony, appointed Field-Marshal Graziani Viceroy¹ after the return to Italy of Field-Marshal Badoglio, and ordered the withdrawal of a large part of the Italian troops. He provided for the complete occupation of the whole territory of Ethiopia, the suspension of banditry and the

¹ Succeeded in 1927 by H.R.H. the Duke of Aosta.

dispersal of the remaining rebel groups, and in Rome he received the homage of the Ethiopian chief who had made submission.

In his speeches on the international situation the Duce repeatedly insisted that Italy absolutely desired peace, which was necessary to her for the development of the vast new territories annexed. Many observers were surprised at his tolerant attitude towards League hostility, but he wished to leave every door open for conciliation, although he did not fail to issue warnings which should have induced the more intelligent among responsible statesmen to act more wisely than they did.

Nevertheless throughout the summer and autumn no gesture of understanding was forthcoming.

In July 1936 the civil war in Spain broke out, and immediately armed assistance to the Reds on a vast scale was organized, and General Franco, who would easily have swept the country from end to end in a few months, as he had the great majority of public opinion on his side, was held up by the international brigades composed of foreigners from a score of different countries, organized, armed, equipped, and financed by Bolsheviki Russia and France. It was for this reason, and to prevent the whole of the Western Mediterranean from falling into the hands of the Communists and of other forces hostile to Italy that the Spanish Nationalists received the support of Italian volunteers, although these were much less numerous, and came much later than the foreigners aiding the other side. Many of the Italian volunteers had barely returned from East Africa.

A victory of the Red Government in Spain would have been a victory not only for Communism but for Geneva, indeed a vengeance of the League war-

mongers. It was this that Mussolini was determined to avert. He concluded the army manœuvres of that summer in Irpinia with a warning contained in his speech at Avellino : " Not in spite of the war in Africa, but in consequence of the war in Africa, the Italian fighting forces are to-day more efficient than before. We may always, within a few hours and with a mere order, mobilize eight million men, a formidable mass which fourteen years of the Fascist Regime have brought to the high temperature necessary for self-sacrifice and heroism." He realized that the rancour of Italy's many enemies would only give way before an Italy ever stronger and absolutely determined not to surrender. With reference to that speech Gabriele D'Annunzio sent him a message of full solidarity : ' The words of Dante are suited to you. The shade of Farinata stands ever more erect on the fiery tomb. His face is open. I have admired you, and I admire you in your every act and your every word. O comrade, do not befoul yourself by addressing yourself to the malodorous cesspool of Geneva.'

The Duce's slogan, addressed to the fighters in East Africa, still held good : ' Many enemies, much honour.'

XXI

THE AXIS

AGAIN in the summer Mussolini threshed the wheat in the reclaimed marsh lands, and in the autumn he laid down in his speeches at Bologna and Milan those guiding principles which had such world-wide reactions. The first message was again one of peace : " Peace in work and work in peace," on the new plane of the Empire which imposes formidable problems to be solved. In Milan he appealed to the Italians to devote themselves to the development of the new empire, declared that the idea of disarmament had definitely failed, together with the formulæ about ' collective security ' and ' indivisible peace ' ; the League, too, he said, had collapsed because it had proved incapable of reforming itself ; he demanded justice for Hungary, announced a possible agreement with Great Britain, and for the first time defined the value of the Rome-Berlin axis.

On January 2, 1937, the ' Gentlemen's Agreement ' between Rome and London was concluded ; but the tension, attenuated for a few weeks, became acute once more during the succeeding months. Mussolini's second visit to Libya to inaugurate the great coastal road 2000 kilometres in length between Tunisia and Egypt aroused the ire of the reptile Press of Europe, made suspicious by Italy's policy of friendship with the Moslem world. In March

that same Press, and indeed the whole of the anti-Fascist forces of the world sent up a howl of joy when the Italian volunteers in Spain, who had been victorious at Malaga, were held up at Guadalajara after a gallant fight against a hostile international force four times as large, and with a ceaseless stream of lies tried to prove that they had been cowards. These lies were eventually nailed to the counter, and Mussolini reacted with his watchword to the Italians: 'Remember and be prepared.' He also concluded an agreement with Yugoslavia, drafted plans for economic self-sufficiency, and on the occasion of the army manoeuvres visited Sicily, which he declared to be the "geographical centre of the Empire."

In September he went to Germany to set the seal of Italo-German friendship, which was not based solely on the political situation of the moment, but also on the common ideals of the two successful revolutions. After Hitler, Mussolini spoke, also in German, addressing the vast crowd gathered in the Olympic stadium of Berlin. That immense concourse in the Maifeld was probably larger than any popular assembly recorded in history. On November 6, 1937, the tripartite Italo-German-Japanese treaty against Communism was signed. Finally, on December 11, Italy withdrew from the League of Nations, thus taking from it any surviving influence, any real *raison d'être* in connexion with its aims as laid down in the Covenant.

The Italian volunteers fighting in Spain took part in the capture of Bilbao, Santander, and later of Tortosa, at the cost of heavy losses, defeating the bands of internationalists who recognized no fatherland, the political exiles, the anti-Fascists of every shade, on the very battle-ground which they had

chosen. The international tension arising out of the Spanish conflict was embittered by French complicity and by the diplomacy of Mr. Anthony Eden. The demagogues of the French *Front populaire* conferred on the struggle the character of a religious war, and tried to expand it into a general conflagration which would certainly have broken out if Italy had not been strong, very strong indeed, on land, on the sea, and in the air, as the Duce had willed that she should be. It was this strength, united within the Axis to that of Germany, which saved Europe from the catastrophic disaster which the pacifist war-mongers were thirsting for.

In the face of that danger of this ideological fanaticism, Mussolini hastened on the work of economic self-sufficiency as a necessary guarantee of resistance in case of conflict. He reasserted the policy of autarchy which he entrusted to the Corporations and to the National Research Council. His peremptory watchword now was that autarchy¹ must be endowed with an almost mystical character and no sector of national life was neglected in this connexion. In the political field Achille Starace, the Secretary of the Fascist Party, later returned from the conquest of Gondar, carried out the Duce's instructions with regard to the discipline of the rank and file, and the selection of the leaders and the manner of making the best use of them.

The rhythm of reconstruction in every field of Italian life did not slow down during the Ethiopian campaign nor after. Mussolini himself handled the question of regulating prices and that of the currency, which again appeared on the horizon after the inflation decided on by the French *Front*

¹ The policy of autarchy has been much criticized in certain foreign quarters as something almost immoral; if, however, it is called 'economic self-sufficiency' it sounds more respectable.

populaire Government. He reorganized the youth institutions, which were all welded into the Gioventu'italiana del Littorio (G.I.L.) under the direct dependance of the Party, reconstructed the mercantile marine, promoted a loan for the rebuilding of rural dwellings, intensified the anti-tuberculosis campaign, enacted measures for assisting large families financially and for conferring prizes for the birth of children and for marriages among the poorer classes, he promoted the tourist traffic, advocated Italian fashions in women's clothes, provided for many forms of maternity and infant welfare and assistance for all classes of workers. In other fields he developed the Italian broadcasting organization, gave new life to the cinema industry and created the 'Cinema City' near Rome, instituted Saturday half-holidays, cheap excursion trains, open-air theatrical spectacles for the masses and a variety of special exhibitions.

XXII

PEACE WITH JUSTICE

A MATTER which interested Mussolini very particularly was the reconstruction of Rome on imperial lines, and for this purpose he provided for the isolation of the Mausoleum of Augustus, and the Augustan exhibition on the bimillenary of the Emperor. A number of important public buildings were erected and new streets driven through the demolished slums, the access to St. Peter's improved, and the Mausoleum of Hadrian (Castel Sant' Angelo) restored.

In the provinces the public works policy was no less active than in the capital ; bridges, roads, ports, airports, hydroplane stations, dry docks, arose everywhere. A new line from Florence to Bologna, shortening the journey from three hours to a little over one hour, was built, and a new road bridge across the lagoon connected Venice with the mainland. The new railway station of Milan, begun in 1906, was at last finished, while Florence was provided with an entirely new one. A great deal was done to develop the mines of Italy ; old abandoned ones were again operated and many new mineral deposits discovered, the ship-building yards and the major industries were improved and expanded and many new monuments to the illustrious dead erected so as to remind the Italian people that ' it is the spirit which dominates matter.' The Navy was strengthened by the addition of new ships and the Air Force endowed with machines which have

conquered nearly all the world records. Mussolini himself secured his certificate as a military pilot, and so did all the male members of his family who were old enough; his son Bruno took part with success in the Istres-Damascus-Paris flight, and was promoted captain for the raid from Rome to Rio de Janeiro.

After a protracted period of international difficulties the dawn of better days appeared when the British Prime Minister, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, saw that only an agreement with Italy could avert a world catastrophe. The commencement of fresh negotiations led to the resignation of Anthony Eden. Not very long before the other stormy petrel of European diplomacy, the sinister Rumanian Titulescu, had also disappeared from the scene.

On April 16, 1938, the British-Italian agreements were at last signed, restoring relations between the two countries to their old basis of friendship. But in the meanwhile the errors of Herr Schuschnigg had helped to bring about the 'Anschluss,' which took the great bulk of European public opinion by surprise, although to Mussolini himself it was not unexpected, as appears from the revelations contained in a speech which he delivered afterwards in the Chamber of Deputies. For the support which he lent to Hitler in those difficult days, the Führer telegraphed to him: 'Mussolini, I shall never forget.' This expression of friendship was confirmed in the Duce's speech at the Palazzo Venezia early in May, which put the seal on Italo-German relations. It was indeed obvious that neither Italy nor any other Power could oppose the 'Anschluss' when the immense majority of the Austrians evidently desired it.

On March 30 after the Duce, as Minister of the Fighting Services, had reported to the Senate on the



Photo Lenz

MUSSOLINI AND THE QUADRUMVIRATE

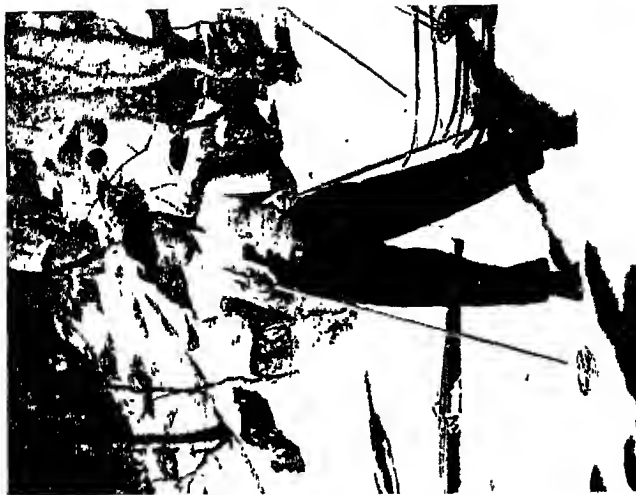


Photo Luce

MUSSOLINI SKI-ING

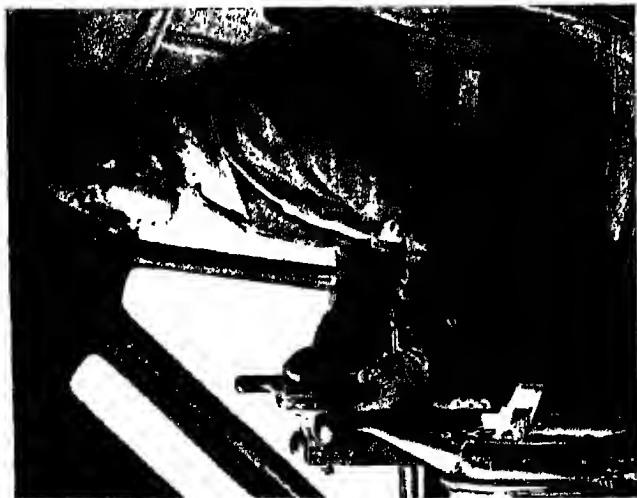


Photo Luce

MUSSOLINI THE PILOT

efficiency of Italy's military, naval, and air forces, the two Chambers voted a resolution appointing the King and the Duce Marshals of the Empire.

The League of Nations at long last made up its mind to face realities, and permitted such of its members as had not already done so to recognize Italy's conquest of Abyssinia. Mussolini in a speech at Genoa confirmed the political and ideal motives of the Rome-Berlin Axis, and warned other nations that it was high time that they should learn to know the new Fascist Italy and not fall again into the many errors committed in the past to the prejudice of all concerned, and he concentrated the whole spirit of Fascist action in the slogan : ' He who stops still is lost.'

The Spanish civil war was still dragging on and the two rival armies fighting on the Teruel and Ebro fronts represented the sharp latent conflict of principles and political interests between the various European Powers. The non-intervention formula, a residue of League methods, failed to conceal the help supplied by each of the two groups of Powers to Barcelona and Burgos. In his Genoa speech Mussolini had flatly declared that the policy of the French *Front populaire* in support of the Spanish Reds constituted an obstacle to any real understanding between Italy and France. At the same time the Franco-Soviet Pact and the ties between France and Czechoslovakia prevented the possibility of fair treatment of the German minorities included in the latter country by the Peace Treaties.

Over these and other reasons of dissent the international situation became ever more obscure throughout the summer of 1938. Neville Chamberlain was being subjected to the bitter attacks of the Opposition in the House of Commons on account of

his policy of appeasement and of the agreement with Fascist Italy, and the usual reptile Press, under the inspiration of sinister forces, proceeded once more to libel Italy and Germany ; among other things it was broadcast all over the world that the Italian harvest had been so disastrous that Italy would be forced to capitulate to her opponents through starvation.¹ It was also widely stated that Germany had given up all idea of settling the Sudeten question from fear of a Franco-Russo-British reaction. Nevertheless Mussolini once more returned to the Pontine district to thresh wheat, and was soon able to announce that far from having failed, this year's Italian wheat crop, in spite of bad weather, was a bumper one (81,000,000 quintals) never equalled before. At the end of the military manœuvres he stated that "to cheat oneself is folly, not to be prepared is a crime." On August 18 he flew to the island of Pantellaria off the coast of Sicily to inspect the fortification works.

The Sudeten question was then becoming ever more acute. Lengthy negotiations, with occasional armed encounters, dragged on without arriving at a settlement, even after the intervention of Lord Runciman sent out by the British Government in a well-meant attempt at conciliation. The Sudetens claimed certain guarantees promised to them in the Peace Treaties but never applied. Germany was not prepared to leave several million Germans to their fate, and Italy, faithful to the policy of the Axis and supporting the principle of self-determination of peoples, was resolved to stand by Berlin. At the close of the National Socialist Congress in Nuremberg on September 12, Hitler opened the culminating phase of the crisis with a notable speech.

¹ Even one of the most reputable London papers published a leading article to that effect, in a tone of canting compassion.

In view of the danger of a disastrous conflict between the German claims and the resistance to them by Beneš, Chamberlain intervened personally ; he flew to Berchtesgaden and later to Godesberg to meet the Führer, while the *Popolo d'Italia* published a significant open letter to Lord Runciman suggesting that he should promote a plebescite and thus secure a settlement not only of the Sudeten problem, but also of that of the Magyars and Poles subject to Czechoslovakia, in accordance with the wishes of the communities concerned. The obstinacy of Prague, supported by France, continued to hold up the agreement, and indeed compromised it by a change of ministry and the announcement of mobilization.

Every phase of the final negotiation was closely followed and publicly commented on by Mussolini during his journey to north-eastern Italy, commencing with Trieste on September 18. In every city and village along the roads of the redeemed territory, of the old frontier, of the mountains and the plains, which twenty years ago had witnessed the tragedy of the great War, masses of workmen and peasants gathered enthusiastically around the man who had promoted their new destinies. Ex-servicemen and boys of the Fascist youth organizations, mothers, old men and children shouted aloud to the Duce expressions of their unswerving faith and devotion which made them ready for any ordeal. Hour by hour Mussolini held converse with vast crowds, to whom he openly and frankly set forth his intentions, explained the exact point which the situation had reached at the moment, and disseminated in all a sense of strength and serenity even in the face of the gravest possibilities. He addressed himself also to those responsible for

the policy of foreign countries, inviting them to agree on a recognition of rights as a sole means for averting a conflagration. He never ceased from rejecting as utterly absurd the idea of a war so devoid of substantial motives, and also considered the possibility that the conflict might remain localized.

When half-way through his journey in Venetia he flew from Trieste to Rome to unveil, on 23 September, the Ara Pacis, which had been reconstructed from the various surrounding fragments near the Mausoleum of Augustus. During the second phase of his journey between Belluno and Vicenza he learnt that the situation had become far more serious, but he did not alter the planned itinerary, and brought it to a close at Verona where he declared that in that very week the fate of Europe would be decided.

On his return to Rome he was informed by Count Ciano, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the obstinate and negative attitude of Czechoslovakia had induced Hitler to anticipate the date fixed for action ; on September 28 at 2 p.m. the German Army would move forward to liberate the Sudetens. The Duce at once took the necessary military measures, had units displaced and reservists called back to the colours. On the following day all the European Governments concerned were engaged in mobilization of fleets and armies. On the same September 28, when only four hours remained before the first shot was to be fired, Neville Chamberlain appealed to the Duce to induce Hitler to suspend his action and to summon an international meeting which might settle the problem without war. Mussolini acted instantaneously ; he obtained a suspension of action on Hitler's part, and a meeting was arranged at Munich between the

Führer, Chamberlain, Daladier, and himself. He left Rome for Munich, and the General Staffs suspended their strategic consultations. Hitler came to meet him at Kufstein. In Munich the Duce proposed a draft resolution and conducted the debate until a settlement on the lines suggested by himself was reached. Thus after twelve hours, the conflict having been settled without war, he returned to Italy and brought his triumphal journey to an end with a very short speech delivered from the balcony of Piazza Venezia to that same crowd which had heard him announce the formation of a New African Empire. "We have lived through memorable hours," he said; "in Munich we have acted for peace according to justice. Is not this the ideal of the Italian people?" The roars of applause with which the question was greeted left no doubt as to what the answer was.

While the Italian people and the Germans were proud and satisfied at the solution secured without war, the jetsam and flotsam of the old sanctionist conventicles vented their impotent rage at the collapse of Versailles, which followed so closely on that of the League.

The immediate consequences were the recognition of Italy's East African Empire and the appointment of an ambassador to Rome by France, the application of the Easter Agreement with Great Britain and British recognition of the Empire, an Italo-German arbitration award for the new frontiers between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as the Duce had predicted in Munich, signed in Vienna by Ciano and von Ribbentrop. Finally a settlement over the Polish minority was arrived at directly by negotiations between Prague and Warsaw.

While awaiting further developments in the

international situation, Mussolini set forth and settled during this same period certain fundamental internal questions. In the first place he provided for the defence and development of the Italian race by establishing a definite separation from alien elements. As a matter of fact these principles had been followed from the very beginning of the Regime, but the conquest of the East African Empire demanded a more precise political and legislative formula to avoid the danger of mixed blood in the African territories subject to Italy, and also in the metropolitan territory where the Jewish race showed considerable activity in a spirit which appeared hostile to the principles of the Regime. Any further development of the Fascist system might have been compromised by the tenacious and subtle penetration of Jewish elements in the family, and in the economic and cultural activities of the nation. During the summer the main principles were laid down and in the course of the autumn a series of measures proposed by the Grand Council and enacted by the Council of Ministers created a body of laws and regulations, based on the Roman and Catholic tradition, which were at once applied, without any excesses or persecutions, but also without deviations, because Fascism means the defence of the race, race-consciousness, and race-pride, and the day on which racial policy were to show signs of hesitation would be the beginning of a decadence similar to that which preceded the end of the Roman Empire.

The Grand Council and the Council of Ministers finally drafted the Constitutional reform which was to set the seal on the general reconstruction of the whole Italian body politic. The original Italian Constitution of 1848 was more or less an imitation

of the British Constitution in a bad French translation, and had always been alien and unsuited to the Italian mentality and tradition. Particularly the Chamber of Deputies as then constituted was essentially foreign. It was now substituted, after years of careful study, by the new Chamber of the Fasces and the Corporations, wherein, on a basis of occupational representation, all the nation's activities, economic, educational, and political, are represented. This reform put an end to parliamentarism and electioneering, the effects of which had proved so disastrous in the past.

Another colonial administrative reform was the incorporation of Libya into the national territory and its division into four provinces, thus bringing up the total number of provinces of the Kingdom to ninety-eight. At the same time a system of mass colonization was initiated, on lines never before attempted, and a first instalment of twenty thousand colonists were enabled to settle on the farms of Libya in the autumn of 1938. In 1939 twenty thousand more will be settled there. While the foreign Jews who had flocked into Italy in large numbers since the World War were forced to leave the country, a permanent commission was appointed to facilitate the repatriation and resettlement in Italy of those Italians living abroad who found conditions no longer desirable and wished to return home.

Autarchic policy had by now reached practical results and all the productive forces of the country were mobilized to secure economic self-sufficiency, an absolutely indispensable condition for national security. This policy, it should be remembered, had been forced on Italy by the high tariff walls erected by almost every other country in the world.

Mussolini promoted other activities of the most varied kinds—the creation of a new short-wave broadcasting station at Prato Smeraldo, the electrification of the Rome-Leghorn and Milan-Ancona lines (to be followed by many others), the regularization of the water-flow in the north Italian lakes, a cultural agreement and one for the exchange of labourers between Italy and Germany, and the reform of the system of secondary education.

The varied activities of this period were summed up in a speech in the Chamber of Deputies by Count Ciano on the recent international crisis with these significant statements : “ The vision of an Italy united, armed, endowed with martial ardour, who conquers her empire, who delimits the just frontiers for the various peoples, who from Rome points out the path of reconstruction, sheds light on the lives of our great men and the passing of our heroes. This vision now comes back to us transformed by the Duce into an impressive reality of power and justice.’

This, however, is not the end, but the beginning of Italy’s new imperial history, for ‘ she intends to safeguard with inflexible firmness the interests and natural aspirations of the Italian people.’ For this reason Mussolini warned the ex-servicemen gathered in Rome for the twentieth annual victory celebration that “ we must still sleep with our heads on our knapsacks.” At Udine, during the Czechoslovak crisis, he had spoken of his accession to power with a phrase which opened up new prospects : “ Then we marched on Rome ; during the years which followed the march started from Rome. It is not yet ended. No one has been able to stop us. No one will stop us.”

XXIII

WORLD YEARNING

WITHIN the period foreseen by Mussolini the Spanish crisis reached a solution, with the overwhelming victory of the National forces led by General Franco. The Italian volunteers, grouped in the Littorio division, which was wholly Italian, and in the mixed Italo-Spanish divisions known as the Black, Green, and Blue Arrows, and in the artillery and tank units, commanded by General Gambara (who had succeeded Generals Bastico and Berti), took part in the Catalonian battle with splendid dash and at the cost of heavy losses, while the Italian Air Force cleared the air of all enemy formations.

General Franco's armies reached the Pyrenees in a few weeks, preceded by hordes of Red bandits who were flying to France for safety, often throwing down their arms, but always careful to carry off their booty. In view of the complete collapse of the Red forces, which France had helped politically and militarily, the French Government tried to exact preposterous conditions in exchange for recognition of the National Government of Spain with the object of separating it from its friends and perhaps of attaching it to those very democracies which had done everything to handicap its success. But National Spain refused to give in, and when a hundred thousand fighters marched past through

the streets of Barcelona Franco made a point of placing the Italian volunteers at the head of the procession, those same men whom Mussolini still left at his disposal until complete victory should be achieved. A few weeks later the occupation of Madrid and of the rest of Red Spain brought the Spanish civil war to an end with the complete triumph of the National cause.

Italy's aspirations and Germany's request for the return of her colonies were met with flat refusal. At the same time the three great Western Powers, Great Britain, France, and the United States, began to effect an enormous increase in their armaments, thereby ostentatiously breaking away from the Munich spirit of appeasement, amid threats and anti-Fascist outcries. The French also indulged in alarmist campaigns and outrageous insults in the Press against the Italian Army. Then they began to persecute Italians residing in Tunisia and other territories subject to France.

In view of this attitude the Duce, who had up to that moment merely denounced the agreement of January 1935, in addressing the prize-winners in the wheat-growing competition made the following statement : " On the whole, it is best not to be too well known ; surprise will then operate in full." On January 26, immediately after the fall of Barcelona, he was even more explicit : " The splendid victory of Barcelona is another chapter in the history of the new Europe which we are creating. Franco's magnificent troops and our own gallant volunteers have not only beaten Negrin's Government ; many others of our enemies are now biting the dust. The watchword of the Reds was : ' No *pasaran* ' ; we have passed, and I tell you we shall pass."

This was the reply to the challenge issued by Daladier while brandishing a dagger during his journey through Corsica and North Africa—an untoward gesture which has certainly not cut the knot of the unsolved problems between Italy and France. These are complex and fateful problems which impose themselves on the future but which will not paralyse the dynamic force of our foreign policy. Count Ciano paid official visits at that time to the rulers of Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Poland, and signed a number of agreements, particularly of a commercial character, with various States. On January 11, 1939, Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax came to Rome to resume contact with the Italian Government and pay their respects to H.M. the King of Italy and Emperor of Ethiopia. The conversations between the heads of the two Governments were explicit and without reservations. There was, therefore, no feeling of surprise in Italy when soon afterwards Great Britain reasserted her solidarity with France and hinted at the existence of a military alliance. Immediately after the Führer declared from Berlin that Germany would stand by her friend Italy, should she, for any motive, be involved in a war.

On February 10, on the eve of the solemn religious ceremony to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Lateran treaties, Pope Pius XI died. A few weeks previously, in alluding to the Duce, His Holiness had defined him "the incomparable Minister." The value of the Concordat concluded in 1929 was proved during the Conclave which elected Pope Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli as Pius XII, inasmuch as all the guarantees ensuring absolute freedom of election for the Princes of the Church, gathered together in Rome from all parts of the

world, were strictly observed. In his Easter message the new Pope issued an ardent invocation for peace based on justice, which was in harmony with the repeated appeals of the Duce.

Amid these historic events and the aggravation of the world crisis Mussolini intensified the activities of the Government and of the Party. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the Fascist Movement, he summoned the third Quinquennial Assembly of the Regime, the Chamber of the Fasces and the Corporations, and a meeting of the Old Guard of the fighting squads, provided for an extension of social legislation in favour of the workers, and submitted to the Grand Council, instead of a mere reform of the secondary school system, as had been announced, an organic educational charter, drafted by Giuseppe Bottai, Minister of National Education, in harmony with the principles laid down by himself. This School Charter is indeed a fundamental text of the Fascist Revolution, as are the Labour Charter and the Race Charter ; it provides for a radical reform of the schools, eliminates all privileges and distinctions between students, introduces periods of manual labour inserted between study and physical and military training, with a view to the fuller and more complete formation of men who should be worthy of Fascism and of Mussolini's own example.

XXIV

THE MAN AND HIS WORKS

THIS example is being renovated from day to day ; it has indeed been intensified by the improvised visits of the Duce to the different provinces. He flew to Castiglione del Lago, Naples, Perugia, to see how far the various public works in course of execution were progressing. At Pescara, after having visited D'Annunzio's birthplace, he went into the houses specially built for the fisher folk ; the first woman he met recognized him, and said : " You are the Signor Duce ; thanks to you I have a house to live in." She was a woman of that class which lives, ever ready for hard work and risk, full of ardour and faithful, never a slave to useless scepticism or cultural involutions, immune, in fact, from that *petit bourgeois* mentality which is the bane of men who are tired or anxious only about their comfort and their property, the brand of those who in critical moments hide behind closed windows or let themselves be dragged along like dead weights, ever restive and ever weary.

Fascism is hostile to such men. Mussolini himself never could stand them, even when he was a boy, and revealed his future destiny to a friend : " Others may yearn for their home and a bit of land ; I yearn for the universe. Everything appears to me limited, crushing. . . . I count the hours when I shall return to my boarding school. Communion with

others awakens in me a feeling of brotherhood and detaches me and confers forgetfulness on him whose hopes lie in struggle.'

Mussolini's body is sturdy, his height average, although the dash and vigour of his person makes it appear imposing. His gait is quick and elastic, his movements energetic. Physically, as well as spiritually, he never drops into attitudes of relaxation. His muscular tension is as constant as that of his mind. His erect torso produces an impression of tense energy, and so to an even greater degree does his head, which has the manly outlines of a piece of Roman sculpture. His forehead is high, his ears are small, and the nape of his powerful neck is solidly based on his shoulders. His broad, stern mouth is framed by powerful jaws.

Mussolini's genius is concentrated in the ever-changing expression of his eyes which, preceding his words, penetrate, dominate, and pin down those with whom he is speaking ; they are quicker than the quickest intuition, or they stare wide open but sphinx-like when he does not wish to reveal his thoughts. His beard is thick, but always clean-shaven, and burnishes his naturally dark face, sun-burnt from constant contact with sea and the mountains. His small, delicate hands occasionally rest on his sides, on his desk, on his papers, on the balconies whence he speaks, firm and dominating. During long marches his arm accompanies the alternating movement of the shoulders, and is often raised up in the vigorous Roman salute. His every attitude is simple and shows him at his ease, even when he appears before the crowd in his monumental figure as Duce, which he maintains without embarrassment even in the most anxious situations, on horseback or on the platform, standing up

in a moving car or taking the chair before an assembly.

His movements in sport are equally natural : driving a car, a speedboat or a motor-cycle, on his guard in fencing, piloting an aeroplane, ski-ing, his bare torso exposed on the snows of Mount Terminillo, or plunging into the sea for a swim. Nor does he shrink from physical labour and may be seen with his arms full of wheat sheaves to be threshed, or with an axe, a shovel, or a pick in his hands to initiate some public work.

However occupied, however dressed, he always appears at his ease. We remember the stateliness of his expression in public solemnities, before troops marching past, or when joining the chorus of the Blackshirts at Fascist gatherings. The late Queen Margherita admired in him the Romagnol man of the people risen from the most modest condition to the highest without making any visible effort to refine his manners and learn the rules of ceremony, of which indeed he is a reformer. His natural instinct of command makes of him a born leader of men and a *grand seigneur*. The late Queen, every inch a queen, would tell her intimates that when Mussolini came for the first time to pay his respects to her she expected to see in him signs of embarrassment, but she was disappointed at the perfect self-possession of his bearing, similar to that of men who have always attended Court.

The regime of life which Mussolini has imposed on himself enables him to retain the vigour necessary for his daily burden. He regulates his day according to a method wherein bureaucratic orderly work alternates with sport. He disposes within the twenty-four hours of all matters which do not require more careful consideration, receives the

members of his Cabinet to settle the various political and administrative problems of the State, reads many newspapers, gives audience to innumerable visitors, takes the chair at assemblies and boards, talks to the crowd, visits works in progress, coordinates the activities of others, and then breaks the almost ascetic fatigues of Palazzo Venezia to resume contact with the forces of nature and exercise his muscles in the most varied sports. He regards violent exercise as necessary to balance intellectual effort ; the risk of his frequent aeroplane flights is for him both a rest and a reward. His mode of life is extremely sober and based on the family, his diet frugal, consisting almost exclusively of fruit, milk, and vegetables. He does not smoke nor play cards, he is no gourmet nor an epicurean. He drinks neither wine nor liqueurs, he does not attend dinner parties or social entertainments. He reads many books, at an extraordinary rate, without anything essential in them escaping him, and he occasionally goes to operatic performances, for he loves music. This extremely well-regulated and varied existence eliminates laziness, renews his freshness of mind day by day, discounting the effects of his daily fatigue, which never appear from his countenance. In this way he maintains his human motor ever in perfect condition. His physical and spiritual strength is extraordinary.

Mussolini loves youth and safeguards his own, even if, on one occasion, while speaking to the Senate, he said : " Am I blamed for riding on horseback ? But I am young ! Youth is a divine ailment from which we recover a little with every day that passes ! " He is by nature an anti-sedentary, and one day, when at the *Popolo d'Italia* office an arm-chair had been put before his table,

he exclaimed : " An arm-chair ? An arm-chair for me ? Take it away at once, or I shall throw it out of the window. Arm-chairs and slippers are the ruination of mankind."

Before the inadequacies or errors of this or that subordinate the expressions of his dissatisfaction are explosive, but never transcend to acts of injustice. He quickly calms down. The recriminations and grumblings of the dissatisfied and the impotent are wholly alien to his nature, nor is he subject to romantic melancholy.

He loves the country, and when he takes his brief periods of relaxation at La Rocca della Caminate he often talks to the field labourers, prunes trees, inquires about the crops, sows wheat, and ploughs the fields. Then he drives his car swiftly through the Romagna and deals with the interests of the remotest villages which he happens to visit.

Sleep comes to him as soon as he lies down, a deep, calm sleep even at the end of a stormy day. His memory is remarkable both for men and things. 'Mussolini is not a man of humour,¹ nor an *homme d'esprit* in the French sense,' one of his biographers has noted ; 'as a rule an icy stare freezes the jocular words which someone in his presence allows himself to pronounce ; his conception of life is highly dramatic and frequently tends to the tragic, he likes contrasts of light and high emotions. . . . Born of the people, he loves the epic poem, the tragedy, and the farce ; he has little understanding for smiles and half tones. But he cannot stand pharisaical gloominess and monumental false gravity.' 'The secret of his charm,' another biographer wrote several years ago, 'lies above all in

¹ This comment is not quite accurate. Mussolini has a very keen sense of humour, but he cannot stand cheap humour or jokes at the wrong moment.

the fact that you can never predict what he will do next. His form is one of prodigious variety. . . . The varied wealth of Mussolini's spirit causes him always to receive you with much warmth, and his physical appearance is always admirably moulded according to his state of mind. Now he is irritated ; his head is bent over his desk and the tip of his nose almost touches the paper he is scanning. His hands are under the table, and he looks at you barely turning his head. He says " Yes," or " No," or " Good-bye " slowly, almost in a murmur. Or you find him reading with his back to the door. On hearing you enter he does not budge, but asks " Who is that ? " and on recognizing you he answers without turning round, in a few carefully spelt out words. . . . When annoyed he reacts at once, crumpling up the papers before him, which he throws on one side, and in the meanwhile a fearsome glint appears in his eyes. If he is tired the fire of his expression is covered as by an imperceptible ashen stratum. . . . If he is in good humour he rises, gesticulates violently, describes a scene, reproducing it with mimicry. He laughs, and the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes seem to exude subtle irony. He is serene, and then he appears surprised at any piece of news. He encourages you, he likes you, he helps you. . . . He likes sober, decided, straightforward courage. All redundancy annoys him. If he gets irritated he does it with an imperious thoroughness, never with rhetorical outbursts. He likes and understands drama, but hates melodrama. He likes colour because he is passionately Italian, has an artistic sense, and knows how much enthusiasm and power colour can arouse.'

This is Mussolini the agitator and Party chief during the violent political conflict of the after-

War period ; but substantially he has remained the same after sixteen years of office. His greater patrimony of experience and his heavy responsibilities, by elevating him above all others instead of souring his character, have made him ever more serene and unruffled. He smiles frequently, and his smile is a reward for him who has provoked it ; when the sparkle of his glance accompanies the frank, sudden laugh of his mouth and his eyes, he shows all the youthfulness of his spirit. In moments of emotion or concentration his eyes are half closed and gleam through his eyelashes ; this sometimes happens whether he is addressing individuals or masses of people hanging on his words.

As an orator he cannot be quite compared to anyone else, because his eloquence is intensely personal both in content and in form. He proceeds by peremptory statements, without too many adjectives or repetitions. His persuasive force lies in the logic of the arguments set forth, in their strict concatenation, which does not appear, but always is, thought out, as his writings are always carefully thought out. He says without emphasis the only words necessary to express an idea. He always solves the problems submitted to him, and gives no truce to his adversaries, whom he overcomes with perfect polemical loyalty or sometimes defeats with devastating irony. His voice, metallic in its tone, is virile, slow, and hammers out the words, when it does not assume a tone of aggressive excitement. The emotion felt by his hearers is derived from the substance of the ideas expressed, from their essential importance, which is seen to increase the more they are meditated on. Mussolini never raises his voice for any sort of peroration, he merely slows down his rhythm when he is

making solemn or final statements. When an idea dawns upon his mind he moves his head slightly, as though from the labour of conception. Often the listening crowds guess from his expression what he is about to say, and are influenced like plastic matter by his dominating will. His more important speeches and articles are like so many milestones along the road covered by Fascist Italy, because they are not made up of empty words, but create states of mind and accompany, and indeed predict, action; they are instruments of government like the laws. Mussolini hates vain legalistic and parliamentary eloquence and academic rhetoric. With his sharp, short speeches he always got the better of the most famous orators who were his opponents. He concedes nothing to the play of superficial effects, and remains consistent and sincere, even if he senses the feelings of the crowd as no one else does, and knows how to adapt himself by immediate intuition to the varying states of mind and educational level of the most diverse audiences. In this he is an artist, for he knows how to make himself understood, whether he is talking to working men or soldiers, to diplomats or scientists, to manufacturers or professional men. "I strike every cord of the lyre," he once said, "from that of art to that of politics. I am a political man and a warrior."

A subtle instinct enables him to estimate the imponderable elements of the various situations and gives him a presentiment of the future. While following the track of the great Roman political tradition, he turns his back on the past and constantly looks towards the future. He is more influenced by the variation of things, of the seasons, of the landscape, than by the mutable humours of men. He feels the weather; he is climateric. Of

mankind he has an indulgent, but pessimistic, opinion.

He allows no one to be familiar with him ; for Mussolini there are none of the *éminences grises* who surround almost all other great leaders. He keeps even his closest collaborators at a distance. He does not allow books to influence him. "A book," he says, "is life which has been lived. The master, experience of every day. The reality of experience is far more eloquent than all the theories and doctrines of all languages and all bookshelves." Instinctively he guards against flattery, insinuations, complications, vicious circles of those who are addressing him. In this he is captious and in no wise sociable, even if his activities are predominantly social. Before the masses his personality expands and expresses itself in all its power, but in private conversation his generous spirit reveals itself through his great moderation, reflecting his keen sensitiveness and his innate kindness. He helps as far as he can, he forgives offences, he meets the needs of others with gentlemanly spontaneity, even if he is sceptical of the gratitude of mankind. Professedly a pessimist, in the depth of his conception of life, he becomes an optimist in his daily constructive action, in his unshakable confidence in himself and in the destinies of Italy. Obstacles incite him to react with dash and make him succeed not through the onrush of confused action but through the vigour with which he carries out and develops plans carefully calculated and thought out. When instant and energetic action is required he does not hesitate in the face of any risk, but drives ahead with irresistible impulse, "because," as he says, "we must not be afraid of being bold." In this he is definitely *anti-bourgeois*. "The Fascist creed,"

he says, "is heroism ; the *bourgeois* creed is selfishness."

No other head of a state ever kept in such close touch with persons of every class and category while maintaining himself detached from the influences of individuals and groups. He gives, assists, and grants to the extreme limits of possibility, but "to restore the State I have found the secret in a forgotten little word. For years and years the Italian State, by always consenting, had lost credit and authority. He who wishes to govern must learn to say No ! " Confidence in his sense of justice is now so deeply rooted that even those whose requests are refused realize the reason for the refusal.

Just because he is orderly Mussolini is expeditious and does away with everything superfluous. Nevertheless he knows how to attend even to the minutiae of important matters with the same care that he devotes to foreign policy, amid endless hostilities and difficulties. It is a form of patience which is also wisdom, but is capable of turning into overwhelming action at the right moment. He appreciates positive data, precise terms, statistics, and expert opinions, but has no patience with those who subordinate the whole to detail, the spirit to the letter, ideal values to brute matter. He hates those who generalize on everything, who indulge in empty words, and cannot stand imprecision, emphasis, exaggeration, compromise, and hypocrisy. All this is contrary to his own manner of life, to which he wishes to raise the Italians, correcting in them certain residues of habits and customs of decadent ages. He demands of his collaborators a sense of responsibility, sincerity, moral courage and physical, and immediate, open explanations, and expects them to be ready to face the music them-

selves. For the presumptuous, those who indulge in involved phrases and thoughts and those who are always laying down the law, he has nothing but contempt, and does not suffer fools gladly. His constant practical formula is : " I seek for no one and I turn no one away." He who honestly repents, even after stormy antecedents, is taken by him into his bosom once more without any prejudice. He pardons offenders very frequently. He has even gone so far as to help opponents who have been held up half way, i.e. who are incapable of correcting themselves. He often shows a certain personal sympathy for this or that individual, but he who proves unworthy of it is immediately set aside and, as it were, forgotten.

Mussolini makes a point of keeping promises and he never makes any out of mere demagogic calculation. The simplicity and order of his method of work is such that he succeeds in planning months and even years ahead what he will do in the future, and he never fails in his undertakings. He will not tolerate privileges for himself, for the members of his family, or for the Fascist leaders. He is utterly without vanity. His sole ambition is to make Italy great among the nations of the world. His honesty is above suspicion, his contempt for money and for this world's goods is but a part of his own disinterestedness which he knows he cannot expect in others to the same degree, but which makes him unbending towards profiteers. For himself he has refused all honoraria as a Minister.

While he is neither a bigot nor a Puritan (indeed he cannot stand the self-styled Catos or the hair-splitting zealots), he is in practice and not in words a moralizer and an educator of the people. His family life is serene and founded on the authority of

its head, as was the case in the patriarchal families of ancient Rome. His wife Rachele, a wise house-keeper, looks after the home and the children and appeared supremely happy to be by the side of her man at the wedding of her daughter Edda with Galeazzo Ciano and at those of her sons Vittorio and Bruno on their return from the Ethiopian war. Mussolini himself also attended with the affection of a father the weddings of Vito and Rosa, the children of his brother Arnaldo. He soon became a grandfather. He is proud above all else of having been a good soldier in the trenches, as he was unhesitatingly proud to allow Bruno to face the risks of crossing the Atlantic by air. His character is not unbending or ferocious, as some people think, but of a deep and manly kindness. Even in the necessary application of his work he does not allow custom to make him get stale ; he is always fresh, supple, agile and, he interrupts his day spent as ' the emperor of the employees ' with gymnastics, morning rides, and frequent sporting activities. He gives the example of his own application of his precept to the young, which holds good for the elderly as well : ' Libro e moschetto, Fascista perfetto ' (book and rifle make the perfect Fascist).

His nature constantly finds expression through the most divers and unexpected aspects, as if he were living several lives at the same time. The hardships he underwent in his youth have enriched his sense of humanity. The sufferings of the poor cause him real pain. " I cannot sleep," he said, after his first journey to Sicily, " when I think of the disgraceful hutments in which fifteen years after the earthquake the people are still crowded. I have them burnt down as fast as I can have new dwellings erected. But it can never be done quickly enough."

During his second visit to the island he insisted on descending four hundred metres into the bowels of the earth in a stifling sulphur mine. Since he has been in power he has steadily combated and almost vanquished pellagra and malaria. Every day immense numbers of Italians and even of foreigners of all classes appeal to him with petitions to secure pecuniary assistance or his intervention to settle the most incongruous questions, and his private secretariat disposes daily of an enormous amount of work.

Mussolini has a special weakness for children ; he kisses them, he listens to their songs, he lets them cling round him in bunches when he visits schools or summer camps by the sea or in the mountains. He respects, extols, and protects woman as a mother, but he does not regard woman as the equal of man, and still less as his superior. He is a man in the classic sense, and the old nineteenth-century conception, which made of romantic and sentimental love the pivot of men's lives, is alien to him. He is a male who judges women in the old Roman spirit : " She is analytic and not synthetic. Has she ever made any architecture throughout the ages ? Tell her to build a hut, I do not say a temple. She cannot do it. She is alien to architecture which is the synthesis of all the arts, and that is symbolic of her destiny." He considers architecture, in fact, as the summing up of man's constructive genius. He stands for Michelangelo as against Raphael. He has himself collaborated in the plan for the Arch of Victory at Bolzano. He loves building and feels keen sympathy for builders.

The people see in him, in fact, the builder of Italy's fortunes. His influence over the masses is absolute. When he addresses great popular gatherings all eyes and hearts concentrate on him, and

frequently there are actual dialogues between the Duce and the crowd, outward expressions of mutual understanding of totalitarian consensus of opinions. When receiving visitors he at once puts them at their ease and they experience no timidity before the man whom they had long wished to meet, even though they might feel some awe at the idea of meeting him ; he is perfectly simple in manner and knows how to place himself on the psychological plane of his visitor. His personality undoubtedly fascinates even the most bitter opponents. An Italian writer, who happened to find himself in Paris in a hot-bed of anti-Fascists remarked : " To see them and listen to them one would think that they never wished even to hear his name mentioned ; yet they never talk of anyone else and are constantly repeating his name ; they would not like to see him even in their mind's eye, yet they have him always before them ; they wish to rebel against his authority, and yet they submit to it every time they imagine him ruthlessly smiting ; they wish to ignore him and the vast effects of his activities for the mere pleasure of denying them, yet they feel his fascination to the point that sometimes the fear of actually admiring him becomes greater than that of the penalties he inflicts against traitors and exiles."

Mussolini has always shown a special devotion for the memory of the men who fell in the War, and of those who died for the Fascist Revolution or in execution of their duty. Instinctively averse to everything macabre, he honours the tombs of the martyrs for the national cause, and has had many monuments raised to them inspired by the conception of victory and triumph. He extols the value of sacrifice, for it is the blood of the brave which makes the wheels of history revolve. Full of mysticism

was a speech he delivered before the Fascists around the biers of the *squadristi* who had been treacherously murdered at Modena ; and in all the critical or solemn moments of the political struggle, after the Ethiopian war and during the Spanish conflict, he insisted that the fallen should receive the highest honours, and their fathers, brothers, and sons on receiving from his hands the insignia tributed to them have often asked to be allowed to fight in the place of their departed relatives to avenge their death.

In his meetings with foreigners Mussolini has the great advantage, shared by few other statesmen, of a wide knowledge of languages—French, German, English, Spanish, to say nothing of the many Italian dialects. He can talk in the vernacular to a Romagnol labourer as to General Astray, to M. Laval as to Herr Hitler or Neville Chamberlain, to journalists from every part of the world as to ambassadors from most countries, and can address millions of Germans in their own tongue. At Munich last September he alone could converse with the British and French Premiers and the Führer respectively in English, French, and German.

The Japanese Ambassador, Yosuke Matsuoka, said of him : " I am convinced that it is not only the art of government which makes of him an incomparable man. His speeches are inspired by a human force which raises him above all the ideas of all peoples ; he is yours, but he belongs to the world. We could understand him and be devoted to him as you understand him and are devoted to him. His higher vision of all problems and all men, of justice and error, of principles and contingent facts, his perfect humanity which places him above

the common run of men, his unruffled calm and his generosity make me think that his nature is something superior and divine."

Mussolini's chief merit lies in his understanding of the whole of modern life, between the past and the future, and in participating even in its mechanical aspects without ever losing the sense of the oldest Italian tradition, of her civil aristocracy matured through the centuries. He has linked up the Italy of the twentieth century with the Rome of the Cæsars, not by a return to the past, but by making his people march at the forefront of modern nations. He regards his capacity for converting and reforming without destroying that which should be preserved, as an art. In this does his policy consist. "My art is the art of arts," he states, "the most difficult of all ; I manipulate a substance which is not inert, but the most unsteady and delicate—man."

Originally he had to impose himself as a rebel against the decadent old Italian world which was subject to all foreign influences. But from the moment when he left the Socialist Party and founded the *Popolo d'Italia* he began to build up a new world in the minds of his followers and gradually he imposed it on the whole Italian nation through the War and the Revolution. In a first period his work consisted of bringing Italian civil life on to the same level as that of peoples who had been united and independent for centuries. Once that level had been reached, he continued to build in a revolutionary sense, gradually, with a sense of opportuneness, without forcing the pace when times did not seem ripe for a particular reform. But after sixteen years of the Regime, the Constitutional transformation has now reached its zenith ; it has

taken on new strength and penetrated into mind and matter instead of becoming attenuated with the passage of time, unlike what happened in the case of the French Revolution or even in that of the Bolsheviki.

While always acting according to a spiritual conception of life, he attributes the first place to action. "I am all for movement," he says, "I am a marcher. . . . One of the main contributions to the increase of work has been supplied by my efforts to reduce useless talk." In this, as in many other pernicious habits which seemed rooted and unalterable among the Italians, he has modified the customs of the nation, their manner of life. "Democracy has destroyed the style of life of the people. Fascism reconstitutes that style, viz. a line of conduct, colour, force, picturesqueness, the unexpected, the mystical, in a word everything which counts in the soul of the multitude." But he makes no concessions to the defects of local life, to regional or municipal divergencies, which he has indeed repressed severely or eradicated. Disintegrating personal squabbles annoy him intensely, and he reacts against them by putting on one side competitors and dissidents. He has succeeded in imposing a civil discipline which for centuries had been unknown to the rebellious and hyper-critically individualistic of the Italians ; they had been long accustomed to place their personal interests before those of the community, had no idea of national organization, and were averse to military life, disliked uniforms and hierarchical subordination to authority. He has made of us a military nation with a tradition of fine achievements and victories. He has altered the physical and moral bearing of individuals, and even the language by bringing

new words into common use. He has conferred a dynamic energy on the people, has regimented them into capillary organizations, political, syndical, corporative and military, without encroaching on the family—indeed he has rehabilitated it by protecting it through numerous welfare institutions. The health of the Italian people has improved and its longevity increased, the physical aspect of Italian youth has become more athletic through the vast development of sport in every form. Mussolini has done away with scepticism and sentimentalism, inculcating in every Italian a new national pride, a virile and conscious sense of duty, which at times approaches mystic devotion and engenders a readiness for self-sacrifice. But there is no hardness in this new Fascist education, rather is there a spirit of brotherhood and comradeship.

To these material aspects of Mussolini's influence on the physical and spiritual health of the Italians, we may add the practical results of his policy. For these the work and name of Mussolini will be ever associated, whatever may be the future destiny of his own person. Of these results some may be regarded as veritable masterpieces of statecraft, to which no one can refuse recognition, not even his opponents. These are the achievement of the Revolution without a massacre,¹ conciliation between the Italian State and the Papacy, the Labour Charter, the corporative or guild organization, the conquest of the East African empire, and the effort to secure economic self-sufficiency destined to establish the degree of Italy's power among the States of the world after Fascism had saved them

¹ During the March on Rome, save for one or two small brushes with the Reds, with very few casualties, there was practically no resistance. After the advent of the new régime there were neither executions nor arrests.

from the Bolshevik danger. This whole complex mass of achievements is destined in the future to prove the basis of the new European civilization, and perhaps one day its ethical value will find expression in æsthetic output.

In all these achievements the common feature is that material results always converge towards spiritual aims. Thus, on journalism, the journalist Mussolini has conferred a dignity which is absent in countries governed by a system of Parliamentary democracy. Fascist legislation is inspired by the determination to safeguard the country against the danger of a scandal-mongering and libellous Press and of journalists associated with individuals and groups whose interests are in contrast with those of the country. The Fascist principle is that the discussion of problems and sound constructive polemics are not so much a right as a duty. But Fascism rejects all tendencies of an unavowable nature, the predominance of sensationalism over crime and incitements to corruption and immorality, in a word, all stunts inspired by the lowest type of business journalism calculated to prejudice the moral health of the people. The Fascist Press, and with it the country, are thus withdrawn from all baleful influences due to the enslavement of the pen to sinister and impure suggestions.

Mussolini has also created a new aristocracy, and founded a governing class and a series of cadres competent to deal with all civil, political, and military activities. Under his regime but few titles have been conferred, all of them on great military leaders, save for a small number on men who have rendered valuable political services. On his proposal the King created D'Annunzio Prince of

Montenevoso,¹ Field-Marshal Diaz Duca della Vittoria, Admiral Thaon di Revel Duca del Mare, Field-Marshal Badoglio, first Marchese del Sabotino,² and then, after his victorious conduct of the East African campaign, Duca di Addis Abeba, while Field-Marshal Graziani, the victor in the southern theatre of that same campaign was created Marchese di Neghelli.³

In the field of art and letters and science it was Mussolini's idea that the Royal Italian Academy be founded ; it organizes scientific, literary, and artistic congresses, confers prizes for important works in the intellectual domain, issues publications of various kinds. He it was who enabled Senator Treccani to complete the *Enciclopedia italiana*, now recognized as the most important and valuable of all the great encyclopædias, while he took the initiative of a national edition of the works of D'Annunzio, Alfredo Oriani, and other writers, and promoted celebrations in honour of many of the greatest Italians of the past and of more recent times, and had many ancient monuments restored. Another initiative was that of celebrating every year a series of men great in different fields belonging to a particular region of Italy. Although the reform of the educational system was directly the work of his successive Ministers of Education, Mussolini was always their inspirer and supporter. Similarly, while the reform of the law codes was largely the work of the former Ministers of Justice Alfredo Rocco and Prof. De Francisci, it was Mussolini who proved the driving force, and in the measures

¹ This title was chosen because Montenevoso is the pivot of the new Italian frontier secured by D'Annunzio's seizure of Fiume.

² The conquest of Sabotino (Isonzo front) was Badoglio's greatest achievement in the World War.

³ Neghelli was the scene of Graziani's decisive victory on the southern front in Ethiopia.

for dealing with juvenile crime and the redemption of minors who had fallen into evil ways, in the attenuation of certain excessively severe penalties inflicted for common offences and the intensification of those against persons guilty of crimes against the State or the community as a whole, we can perceive clearly the Mussolini touch. He also insisted on severity in the punishment of all offences against maternity (illegal operations, etc.) and the race.

Many of Mussolini's educational ideas find expression in phrases, inscriptions, and slogans engraved, sculpted, or stencilled on monuments and public and private buildings all over the country, such as *Libro e moschetto* (Book and rifle), *Vivere pericolosamente* (To live dangerously), *Roma doma* (Rome dominates), *Noi tireremo diritto* (We shall drive ahead), *Andare incontro al popolo* (To go towards the people), *Molti nemici molto onore* (Many foes, much honour), *Ghi si ferma è perduto* (He who stops still is lost), etc.

Although Mussolini never tires of repeating that it is experience and not printed paper that has moulded his ideas, he has acquired a wide culture which is constantly growing. Even when he was an elementary school teacher, a workman, or a student, he was familiar with the greatest authors of the chief literatures of the world. As a young man he devoted long hours to the study and the translation of German authors, such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Stirner, Weininger, Marx, Schiller, Klopstock, von Platen, Heine, Goethe, and Hegel. His favourite Italian authors are Dante, Carducci, Oriani, Foscolo, Pareto; his French favourites are Sorel, Blanqui, Balzac, Le Bon. He reads and re-reads Plato, and likes to discuss Phædon's arguments on the immortality of the soul. Occasionally he reviews some new publication. He listens to the

operas of Wagner, Verdi, and Puccini, but "I adore Beethoven," he says, "as the greatest creator of earthly symphonies and harmonies. The joy which he imparts to the spirit is often accompanied by a subtle, almost agonizing thrill, so high and superhuman is it. In fact, it is only the highest summits which gives us the giddiness of the absolute and the unknown. Beethoven's music detaches man from his mortal humanity. He is the prodigy of the saints led by God."

Mussolini is neither a theorist nor a doctrinaire, and he has no love for the chronicles and narratives of deeds accomplished, however great. He who makes history, he believes, has no time to write it. Nevertheless, he keeps a diary of personal notes. He is not systematic, nor a writer of treatises. Although a writer in the truly classical sense, he prefers facts to ideological elucubrations claiming to attain and fix the absolute and the eternal. But his ideas are clear and based on solid organic principles which inspire his whole activity. A realist, yet he rejects the mean animal conception of social life, solely regulated by economic determinism. He keeps his feet on the earth, but all his aspirations tend towards the ideal. If his spirit rises superior to the trifling vicissitudes of human contrasts, yet he is never estranged from the harder exigencies of the nation's struggle for life. He boldly asserts the unsuppressible functions of that violence which cuts knots, solves situations, and overcomes obstacles in moments of crisis, from which the fate of a people, both at home and abroad, depend. He justifies it on the grounds of higher ends, and rejects the too easy illusions of non-existent earthly paradises. He has solved the Italian crisis, by facing both the social and the national problem at the same time, which

he has blended into a single whole instead of placing the one in juxtaposition to the other as the old political parties had done in their sterile and disintegrating competitions. He had therefore the right to assert that the Fascist system is one of true democracy, inasmuch as it interprets all the requirements of all the social classes and merges them in the supreme needs of the State.

To overcome obstacles he resorted to force, but his aim was always the common good, and for this reason he has always secured general popular support. The Italian people see in the Duce the representative of all their legitimate interests before the world, the interpreter and defender of the race, he who with the justice of his rule prevents the predominance of a part of the community over the whole, and international predominance to Italy's prejudice. Hence arises the conception of hierarchy without which no lasting order can assert itself. Fascism, like all political and even religious systems which were at the basis of a nation's various cycles of power and civilization, is an authoritarian and centralized democracy.

Besides certain passages of his writings and speeches, the article on Fascism in the *Enciclopedia italiana*, published before the Ethiopian campaign, sets forth the main principles of Mussolini's political and social system. This essay, written by the Duce himself, concludes as follows: 'For Fascism the tendency towards empire, that is to say, towards the expansion of nations, is an expression of vitality; the contrary conception, shrinking from any action beyond the home country, is a sign of decadence. Peoples who rise or are reborn are imperialists; peoples who die are those who renounce their ambitions, Fascism is the doctrine best suited to

represent the tendencies and the states of mind of a people like the Italians, who have re-risen after centuries of neglect or foreign servitude. But empire demands discipline, the co-ordination of effort, duty, and sacrifice ; this explains many aspects of the practical action of the Regime, the tendency of many of the forces of the State and the necessary severity against those who would oppose this spontaneous and fatal movement of twentieth-century Italy by agitating the exploded ideologies of the nineteenth century which have been repudiated wherever great experiments of political and social transformation have been effected. Never have peoples been yearning for authority, leadership, and order as they are now. If every century has a doctrine of its own, from a thousand signs it appears that the doctrine of the present century is that of Fascism. That it is a doctrine of life is proved by the fact that it has aroused a faith ; that faith has conquered souls is proved by the fact that Fascism has had its fallen and its martyrs. Fascism has now secured in the world that universality of all those doctrines which, when they are realized, represent a moment in the history of the human spirit.'

The evolution of the Regime and the course of events in Europe generally are coming to be more and more identified with the personal action of the Duce. It is getting to be more and more difficult to distinguish the private from the public aspects of Mussolini's life. His biography has come to be the history of the Italian nation. In the leading principles of government the figure of the head of the Government cannot be separated from his human personality ; the phrase which a working man addressed to him while he was threshing wheat

in the reclaimed Pontine area, "You are all of us," rather than an intuition, was a statement of fact expressed in simple language. Fascism is the expression of an historic necessity for the nation, but it was Mussolini who created it and who leads according to bold principles which are inspired by his own temperament and genius. For the past sixteen years Italian history is the objective result of his daily activity. The events which have taken place, the reforms effected, the results achieved, are so many chapters of Mussolini's biography.

D'Annunzio, referring to the conquest of Ethiopia, in a message to Mussolini, said : ' After so many battles, so many conflicts, so much will-power, you have indeed achieved that which in the history of great men is hardly ever achieved—you have created your own legend.' Nor was this an unexpected and sudden phenomenon. Georges Sorel with uncanny intuition had predicted it many years previously, when Mussolini still appeared to the majority as a young rebel and a demolisher. Sorel had a vision of Mussolini on horseback drawing the sword, but he also foresaw in him the keen ability of the statesman in another prediction, previous to the World War, contained in a letter to Barrès : ' Italy has the first, the best diplomacy in the world. We shall see great things—either a terrible war or a not less formidable revolution, perhaps both. Italy will never lose her compass. The common sense and balance of the Italian mind is too often ignored in France. To continue to ignore it will cost us dear. In any case, I know a young man, a certain Mussolini, a Socialist, who is the only Socialist I know to-day incapable of making a fool of himself. He will know, indeed,

how to lead his countrymen towards their own interests.'

Mussolini's overwhelming strength enabled him to overcome all opposition and all hostility. During the crisis of 1924 a number of Italian intellectuals, still victims of ideologies imported from abroad, issued a feeble document condemning Fascism and its chief. But immediately afterwards the voices of other intelligent men arose in answer to this manifesto, inspired by a scholar who hates 'aeroplane stunts.' In a few years all the living scholarship and genius of modern Italy has gathered round Mussolini with wholehearted devotion, in the service of the cause, as has been the case with the forces of labour, industry, and sport. Together with D'Annunzio, men of science of all kinds and all temperaments have given their support to Fascism.

Enrico Corradini gave to the Duce the faith and the preparation of the Nationalist pioneers, Guglielmo Marconi the world prestige of inventive genius, Pirandello, Mascagni, Puccini, Respighi, Giordano, Marinetti, Soffici, Papini, Gentile, all placed themselves and their works at the disposal of the National Movement. Even in foreign countries many prejudices have now been cast away, in spite of the obstinate hostility of certain second-class politicians and yellow journalists.

Sometimes, however, enthusiasm for the Duce leads to rather superficial judgments; one of the commonest and most erroneous is the comparison between Mussolini and Napoleon. The difference between these two meteors, both genuinely Italian in race, is very deep indeed. If up to the present the Emperor of the French has not anyone superior to him as a strategist and commander of armies, Mussolini possesses a personal virtue, political and

civil ability and a destiny not only different from but superior to that of the Corsican. "I have never taken Napoleon as my model," the Duce has said, "because no comparison between myself and him is possible. His activity was wholly different from mine. He brought a revolution to an end, I have commenced one. His life shows the errors from which it is difficult to escape—nepotism, the conflict with the Papacy, a lack of all sense of finance and economics. . . . But I have learned something really great from him. He has destroyed all the illusions which I might have held on the faithfulness of mankind. On this point I am bomb-proof." Mussolini does not harbour excessive ambition and vanity like Napoleon, who was also deficient in the social sense. The Duce, unlike him, is not an unprincipled adventurer, and he never outrages the genuine rights of individuals and nations. Mussolini builds, ever according to the line of tradition, pursuing aims of social justice.

'In comparison with the Duce,' an historian wrote, 'Stalin is fired by fanaticism rather than by genius. He lacks not only the subtlety of Mussolini, but also his magic quality.' Affinities with Julius Cæsar are more obvious. "I love Cæsar," the Duce stated. "He alone combined the will of a warrior with the intelligence of the sage. He was really a philosopher who contemplated everything *sub specie æternitatis*. Yes, he loved glory, but his pride did not detach him from humanity." But Mussolini would not fall into an ambush of conspirators. He feels himself thoroughly a member of his own race, even if he states that he belongs to the same class as Bismarck.

Mussolini's devotion for the King and the Monarchy is absolute and unswerving. More than

that, he esteems King Victor Emanuel III, who, after having known him for the first time when he was lying wounded in a field hospital, went to Predappio on June 8, 1938, to visit the house of the blacksmith where the man who offered him the Imperial crown was born.

It is notorious that the Duce has no personal ambitions. A British newspaper in a message on the marriage of the Crown Prince with Princess Marie José of Belgium at the Quirinal thus described him : 'This magnificent artificer of Italy's renovated greatness, this saviour of the Savoy monarchy, this man who effected conciliation between the House of Savoy and the Vatican, will follow, smiling and unruffled, the procession of kings and princes, his forehead crowned with invisible laurels.' In the King and the Duce the new people and the oldest dynasty in the world have met to collaborate for the fortunes of Italy.

The meeting between Mussolini and Hitler was a meeting between the representatives of the Roman and the Germanic peoples to come to an understanding and bring to an end a cycle of conflicts which stained the fields of Europe with blood throughout the centuries. To have conciliated Church and State, the German and the Roman spirit, these are two achievements which give the measure of Mussolini's superiority. Without him Italy and the world would never have heard the words pronounced by Hitler at Palazzo Venezia on May 7, 1938 : "From the day when Romans and Germans first met in history, so far as I know, two thousand years have passed. Finding myself here, on the most glorious soil of the history of humanity, I feel the fatality of a destiny which in the past had not drawn out definite confines between

these two races of such high virtue and such great valour ; unspeakable sufferings of many generations have been the consequence. To-day, after about two thousand years, in virtue of the historic achievement effected by you, Benito Mussolini, the Roman State rises from its remote traditions to a new life. To the north of your country many breeds form a new Germanic Empire. Now, you and I, having become immediate neighbours and learnt from the experience of two thousand years, are determined to recognize the natural frontier which Providence and history have obviously drawn between our two peoples. That frontier will enable Italy and Germany, with a clear separation of the spheres open to the life of the two nations, to secure not only the blessings of a peaceful, certain and lasting co-operation, but will also provide a bridge for mutual help and co-operation. It is my determined intention, and also my political testament to the German people, that the frontier of the Alps which Nature has erected between us should remain intangible for ever. I am certain that for Rome and for Germany a glorious and prosperous future will follow from this fact."

From that moment a phase of history has closed and another has begun through the merit of these two men, who, in political honesty, are equals. These words of mutual understanding and loyal respect, which touched men of the people and men of culture, ex-Service men and Blackshirts, have been among the few sincere expressions of peace and international justice pronounced in Europe during these years of continuous rivalry.

Mussolini has said that in the days of his dogged youthful struggles " with all that I did and above all everything that I suffered, I had a presentiment

that I was preparing for something more important." In the Duce's life cycles of successive enterprise may be distinguished, according to an ascending spiral of ever broader radius and space, and successive phases of preparation, battles, and victories, following a constant incessant rhythm. To the present day he has never encountered an adversary, however powerful, whom he has not overcome ; when he was a revolutionary Socialist, with few friends and no resources save his own energy, he succeeded in demolishing men like Bissolati and other Reformists who were the leaders of the Party, later he prevailed against the deputy Raimondo, its most formidable orator, who supported the Freemasons. He seemed to be down and out when he initiated the interventionist campaign with the *Popolo d'Italia*, and was expelled from the Party, accused of treason and worse ; yet he overcame both the inertia of the neutralists and the hostility of Giolitti and achieved intervention. After the victory he again lived through years of personal tragedy, censored by Nitti's Government, and arrested, his life being threatened ; yet he aroused the nation and conquered power. In the early years of his Government he had to keep certain discordant and ambitious lieutenants in order, besides facing the opposition parties gathered on the 'Aventine,' but he imposed his authority on the former and scattered the latter. During the Ethiopian campaign he had to fight the Negus's army thousands of miles away, plus Geneva and the sanctioncers of all the world, led by the Edens, the Benešes, the Titulescus, the Madariagas, the Litvinovs, the Vasconcelloses ; but in seven months he dispersed the lot, abolished slavery which had existed in Ethiopia since Biblical times and drove

the vehicles of civilization along roads opened up amid the wildest parts of East Africa, where no wheels had ever been seen.

He forges ahead unruffled, sizing up the difficulties of the action which he has in prospect, then strikes vigorously at the right point and at the right moment. One day, as he was going along the valley of the Rabbi in Romagna, he noticed a stone-breaker sweating under the burning sun. He stopped, was recognized by the workman, who had been his school-mate, and sat down beside him to take his place and began to hammer away at the stones. But one large piece refused to split. "It is too hard for Your Excellency," said the stone-breaker. "I have broken harder stones than this," replied the Duce. "It is a question of finding the vein." Then turning the stone round he found it, struck it sharply and it split up into fragments. But he does not merely break things up. Immediately afterwards he proceeds to construct. He is an expert in every construction trade and sees at once if the scaffolding raised to erect a building is adequately safe. On one occasion, after visiting some building works in Romagna, he called someone aside to give warning, without excursions and alarums, that the scaffolding was too weak and might cause accidents among the workers.

In private life he is as simple as the most modest of citizens. The researches of biographers and the definitions of his person annoy him as much as any super valuation of the acts and facts of his life. To a review which had started a referendum among its readers for the best definition of the Duce, he gave orders that the referendum should be stopped, saying that he did not know himself what he was, and that as for definitions time would provide them. When

he fills up his census paper he describes himself as a 'journalist.' He draws his whole income from the profits of his paper, and when he inaugurated the new offices of the *Popolo d'Italia* in Via Moscova in Milan, in considering the difference between the handsome new building and the old 'cubby-hole' in Via Paolo da Cannobio, he warned the staff: "We can move from the tent to the palace provided we are ever ready to return, if necessary, from the palace to the tent. Otherwise we shall be rich in material means but poor in spirit." Before the people of Forlì presented him with the restored Rocca delle Caminate, he spent his short holidays in a plain country house which he had had simply arranged at Carpena. But the headquarters of his activities is the stately Palazzo Venezia.

His most notable characteristics are his perfect sincerity and the balance attained through the contrasts between tragic experiences and supreme satisfactions. The Duce, citizen of Rome and of every municipality of Italy, who to-day has secured the devotion of the people and attained triumphant successes, is the same fighter who one day during the War was stopped near the front lines by a man who asked him: "Are you Mussolini? Yes? Very good. I have an excellent piece of news for you. Corridoni has been killed. Serve him jolly well right. I should like to see all these interventionists done in." The passing of a patrol alone prevented him from avenging on that blackguard the atrocious insult to the memory of his gallant comrade. The beloved Leader, under whose balcony the people of Rome gather to acclaim him on every festive day or when there is a feeling of expectation in the political atmosphere, is the same man who, in 1919, stood alone in Milan, threatened by the

sedition mob, repudiated even by some of his few followers, defeated at the polls, arrested by the agents of the Government and proclaimed a corpse by his enemies. He who has avenged Adowa and is the founder of the Empire, is the same man who as a youth read at Predappio in the newspapers the tragic news of Amba Alaji, Makalleh, and Abba Garima. But his mother had made him recite Brofferio's verses :

Delle spade il fiero lampo
Troni e popoli svegliò.
Italiani, al campo, al campo,
Che la patria ci chiamò.

(The fiery glitter of swords
Awakened thrones and peoples.
Italians, to war, to war,
The fatherland has called us.)

He sometimes commented : "Mother, I shall make the earth tremble." The founder of the National Militia, the Minister of the Fighting Services, the First Marshal of the Empire, is the same soldier whose application to be allowed to attend an officers' training school during the War was rejected on account of his political antecedents. The Duce, who wherever he arrives arouses such widespread enthusiasm, is the same stonemason who, in Switzerland, worked for a few pennies an hour, slept under bridges, and when starving had to beg for a piece of bread. The head of the Government who commands, who directs the work of scientists and technical experts, to whom all men apply to settle their destinies and disputes, is the same man who, during the War, had innumerable narrow escapes from enemy bullets, in duels failed to be touched by the swords of his opponents and whom would-be assassins failed to strike down.

The proletarian who exposed himself to all risks to secure for the workers the most elementary rights is the same ruler who has brought all classes to peaceful and productive collaboration and has freed the nation from the curse of class war.

The revolutionary who had always rejected the hypocrisies of the pacifists and frankly admitted the necessity for action and war in the crucial moments of history, is the same generous-hearted fighter who opposed passionate homicidal violence during the faction fights between Socialists and Republicans in Romagna, who imposed on his exasperated *squadristi* an attempt at pacification with his adversaries on the eve of the March on Rome, who averted the reaction of the Blackshirts against the libellous campaign of the Aventiniani, who, at the request of the erstwhile hostile and sanctionist democracies, intervened with lightning speed to propose the just solution attained in Munich and saved the peace of the world, its riches and millions of lives already destined to be sacrificed.

In writing of Mussolini the biographer finds himself in a situation contrary to that which he would have to face in the case of the great majority of other personalities : inquiries into recondite intentions, into more or less mysterious secrets will prove fruitless, on account of the clarity and sincerity of Mussolini's leading principles ; all will be able to read his life in the open book of Italy's greater history initiated and conducted by him. He is both the composer and the conductor of the great national symphony which is now developing in full after the prelude of the first years. His energy, absorbed in the hard task, is not frittered away in private and matters and questions of secondary importance, nor in vices and personal weaknesses such as have

diminished the stature of nearly all leaders of nations. His sense of justice, his rectitude, his method and his personal disinterestedness raise him ever higher in popular esteem. He stands head and shoulders above so many other great men of history who were tainted with cruelty, selfishness, and covetousness. His whole action, his character, and the fascination which he arouses stress his belief in immortality which makes him despise the accidents of life, even the personal ones.

He warns those who deny the mystery of our ultimate destiny that 'science confers on man extraordinary means. But its teachings do not improve humanity from a moral point of view. . . . Man cannot improve save by withdrawing into himself and meditating. Science supplies him with the means of action, but not of meditation. I do not see anything else than religion which can raise him and improve him. The one and the other, however, are not incompatible. They are complementary to each other.' One day he said to Carlo Delcroix : " I am a Christian inasmuch as I am a Catholic." To others he admitted " that once, in the course of millions of years a supernatural apparition may have taken place ; it may be that during the next million years such another apparition may be repeated." There is in his spirit, in the face of the greatest problems, a deep and modest humility. His religious sense finds expression in the final passage of his *Life of Arnaldo* : ' I have not and shall not make a will of any kind, neither spiritual, nor political, nor profane. It will be no use looking for it. I have but one wish : that of being buried, by the side of my own people, in the cemetery of San Cassiano. I should be ingenuous indeed were I to expect to be left in

peace after my death. Around the graves of the leaders of those great transformations which are called revolutions there can be no peace. But all that has been done cannot be cancelled, while my soul, freed at last from matter will, after this small earthly existence, live the immortal and universal life in God.'

That is the original spirit of the Fasces which have grouped around them the youthful forces of Italy, ever ready for work and struggle, in the fateful onward march for the formation of the new civilization. The words written by Mussolini as a student, at the very beginning of the present century, are re-echoed in the guiding principles laid down by the Duce in March 1939 when addressing the governing body of the Party on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Fascism :

"An ever more intensive military preparation ; an ever higher social justice."

XXV

ALBANIAN ADVENTURE

TOWARDS the end of 1938 the situation in Albania had become seriously disturbed. The Ambassadors' Conference had in 1921 recognized Italy's special interests in the country, interests which found expression in assisting the Albanian people in every way possible and giving them means to protect themselves against outside aggression. King Zog had come into power in a peculiar manner. He had been a refugee in Yugoslavia and had succeeded in making himself master of the country with Yugoslav help, but once he had done so he came to terms with Italy, with whom he concluded a treaty of alliance in 1927. Italian help enabled him to develop the country, build roads, bridges and the port of Durazzo, and reclaim some of the pestilential marshes. Altogether Italy invested nearly twenty million sterling in Albania.

For many years Zog played off Italy against Yugoslavia, but as soon as relations between the two Powers improved he felt he must find some way of strengthening his position which had become precarious. His misgovernment had made him very unpopular, and during the past months repeated appeals had reached the Italian Government from responsible quarters all over the country imploring intervention on behalf of the people.

On March 8, Zog proposed a new and closer

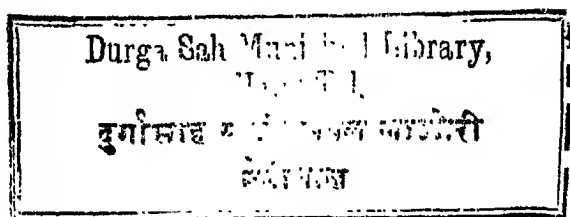
treaty with Italy ; the Italian Government accepted the idea in principle and began to prepare a draft. Suddenly, on March 20, Zog asked that an Italian force be sent to Albania. The reason for this request appeared obscure, but it afterwards transpired that it was intended firstly to secure better protection for the King himself, and secondly, to create fresh disputes between Italy and Yugoslavia which he hoped once more to exploit. The request was rejected, but soon afterwards the draft text of the new treaty was submitted to him. Zog then replied by trying to mobilize his army against the Italians, and when the reservists failed to join up he formed armed bands of brigands and gaol-birds released for the purpose. This created serious disorder, and the Italian residents had to leave the country, except the Legation staff. Then, and then only, was an Italian force sent across to restore order.

The troops landed on April 6, and met with no resistance except on the part of a handful of bandits at Durazzo and Scutari with whom some shots were exchanged, resulting in a score or so of casualties on both sides. Zog, who had boasted of his intention to resist to the last drop of his blood, fled at once to Greece, and everywhere the Italians were welcomed as liberators from what had become an intolerable tyranny. Since April 7 not another shot has been fired.

The Albanian Constituent Assembly met at Tirana on April 9, voted the deposition of Zog and offered the Crown of Albania to H.M. the King of Italy and his successors. The Fascist Grand Council, summoned for the purpose, recommended that the offer be accepted, and on April 16 the Italian Parliament voted a law to that effect. The

union between the two Crowns is to be a personal one, similar to that between Great Britain and Hanover before 1837, or that between Holland and Luxemburg before 1890, the two Governments remaining separate although, of course, closely allied.

This result, of course, strengthens Italy's position in the Adriatic and the Balkans, and incidentally should prove extremely beneficial to the Albanian people, whose economic and educational development will be thereby speeded up. Above all it should make for the consolidation of peace in that part of Europe.



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